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THE WINE OF LIFE

THE WINE OF LIFE

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THE WINE OF LIFE

BY MAUDE ANNESLEY

Whether at Naishápúr or Babylon,
Whether the Cup with sweet or bitter run,
The Wine of Life keeps oozing drop by drop,
The Leaves of Life keep falling one by one.

Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám.

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TO

"THE FRIEND OF MY HEART"

WHO HAS HELPED ME WITH

LOVE AND SYMPATHY

Maude Annesley

Paris, 1907.

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PART I

THE BITTER

other hand holding his glasses, the thumb hooked in his waistcoat.

"You heard what Detective Loam said?"

"Yes."

"You heard him declare that he found this letter in the co-respondent's coat-pocket as it hung in the hall at your house?"

"Yes."

"May I ask you to give your explanation of this?"

"I think the explanation is apparent to the meanest intelligence. Detective Loam acknowledged to your cross-examination that he looked in Mr. Brett's pocket on the suggestion of my husband." She paused an instant, and swept the faces in court with her immense tired eyes. She put up her hand to her head and ran her fingers into the wavy hair on her temples, "and my husband is a very clever man," she ended in a hopeless sort of voice.

Again the reporters made their mystic signs, and for once they wrote the truth; there *was* sensation in court; Lionel Cotter, the novelist, pulled his moustache and put at least half of it into his mouth.

"I'd stake my soul that woman's speaking the truth!" he muttered to Augustin Bonner; to which that celebrity answered—

"Of course she is, but do you imagine the jury will swallow it? They are 'twelve good men and true,' and expect to have the monopoly of those virtues."

"When did you write this letter to your husband?"

"Over five years ago, I think. He was at

Newmarket, and I was ill; that is why it is written in pencil."

"Yes, it is unfortunate it is not in ink; ink fades. I think that is all I have to ask you, Lady Branton." And he sat down.

His "learned friend" rose for his cross-examination. The weary woman in the box drew herself a little more upright and stared at the hard face a few feet in front of her, she watched the strong hand stroking the benevolent-looking whiskers, noticed the long upper-lip drawn down over the firm mouth; then, as the two hands came down to the desk and he swayed towards her and she caught the glint of his eyes over the gold rim of his *pince-nez*, she threw a little glance of encouragement at her friends, who were sitting at the solicitors' table near the reporters' benches.

Then for one hour and five minutes the famous counsel and the woman stood opposite each other, and questions and answers were exchanged—the questions in the rasping voice with its north country burr, the answers in the high-bred, rather haughty tones, grown a little hoarse with much fatigue. Her nerves got wrung to their last pitch of forbearance by the irritating habit for which this counsel was so renowned of skirting round a question, the answers to which might be somewhat embarrassing to his side, the habit of stopping her when she wanted to give a fuller answer by his "Wull, wull, we'll lave that for the prusent!" a habit which made her shut her mental eyes and think "What *have* I said?"

But he could not shake her. His last questions were rasped out in a quietly satirical voice, his hands laid flat on his pile of papers, his whiskered face leant well forward towards the witness.

"Do you rarely mane to say that you had no guilty intercourse with this man? This man whom you acknowledge you wrote with, this man who came to your house constantly, this man with whom you were intimate—this man whom you called by his Christian name? You rarely mane to ask the jury to belave this?"

"Certainly I do. What you suggest would have spoilt everything."

"What do you mane 'spoilt everything?'"

"I mean that true friends are rarer than lovers in this world."

"Hum, hum."

And her tormentor sat down.

Her own counsel asked her three questions only in re-examination, and then the tall slender figure walked down the steps, passed the petitioner—her husband—and his solicitors, and sat down by her friends. She was a little white, her mouth and eyes were drawn, but her head was still held at the angle loved by her friends and hated by her enemies. A small warm hand crept on to her lap and held hers tight, and a tender voice whispered—

"Well done, darling! They *must* believe you."

She looked into her friend's blue eyes with a little sad shake of her head, but the hand only held hers

tighter. A woman's faith in a woman, how sweet a thing it is!

A discussion went on for a few moments between judge and counsel. Then the Court adjourned till the next day, and the third weary day was over.

Out in the glaring sun, only just beginning to lose its worst heat, the three women stood for a few moments and talked to some friends. Women liked Uli * Branton, and now in her trouble they were very encouraging.

"Don't lose heart, my dear," said Lady Elizabeth West; then she put up her lorgnettes and studied the white face. "Just a weeny suggestion of the little pink pot might be advisable to-morrow, child, we don't want them to think you're frightened."

Uli laughed a little low laugh. "I did put some on to-day," she answered, and rubbed one long finger up and down her cheek; "has it all gone? It's this awful heat, you know; it fades everything. My very soul feels faded."

Lady Elizabeth tapped her friend's arm with a rather soiled white glove.

"How about the nights, eh? Got bromide or something?"

"Oh yes, thanks. I take sulphonal; it is most efficacious."

"Well, well, take care of yourself, I shall see you to-morrow. Do you think it will end to-morrow? How many witnesses has your side?"

"Only five. You see one can't refute things like

* Pronounced "Ouli," like the French *où* (where).

that; one can only bring people to say they have seen nothing suspicious, and, as Sir James says, 'those are not much good, people don't commit adultery at *table d'hôte;*' he would only let me call my maid and Benson (as, you see, George has bought the other servants); then my dear Dorry," she turned and laid her hand on the girl's arm who was standing beside her, "she has stayed with me so much; then Waddy Brett has two witnesses, one is his man, who will say that Waddy never put letters in his overcoat pocket!" She had a little whimsical smile as she said this, and shrugged her shoulders slightly.

Mrs. Carstairs stamped a diminutive high-heeled foot.

"What a devil George Branton is! What a fiendish plot!"

George Branton's wife stared, then she laughed a little.

"But of course he's a devil, my dear lady; do I not know that, *moi qui vous parle?* But then such a talented devil! Please remember, all of you"—she swept out her ungloved hands—"never, *never* write a letter to your husband without putting his name in full at least three times in the contents, like a tradesman, you know; otherwise—well, who knows? Well, *mes amies*, I must go, I am positively melting."

She put up her hand to a hansom, the driver of which was watching her expectantly, and she and her two friends got into it. She waved her hand to the other ladies as they drove off. Mrs. Colwyn and she

sat well back, and the *petite* American Dorry Richards did "bodkin." This latter turned her piquante face round to her friend with a smile.

"You see they all believe in you, Uli," she said in her own peculiar accent, and with a squeeze of the hand which was passed through her arm. Uli gave her a little one-sided smile—a smile without any mirth in it.

"Yes, my dear, they all believe in me. But belief, though a very nice commodity in its way, won't buy juries."

"Well, I guess they're fools if they don't see you're speaking the truth. And anyway, it wouldn't cut any ice with me as long as my friends believed in me. My Lord, this country of yours makes me real tired. In America we manage things in the right way; there laws are made by white people for white people, and not for slaves."

She made a disgusted *moue* at the world in general; then she put up her parasol and waved frantically, and the horse was pulled up short before a block of flats.

The hall porter scrunched up a pink evening paper he was reading and squeezed it quickly into his pocket; but Uli had seen the big headlines of the column he had been reading and her head was held a little higher as she stepped into the lift. Dorry looked mischievous. "There remaineth therefore a 'Star' for the people of God!" she murmured flippantly, and Jane Colwyn said: "Hush, Dorry, you're really incorrigible."

Uli opened the door of her flat with her latch-key and the parlourmaid came forward to meet her.

"Will you have some tea, my lady?" she asked. She was very well trained, and did not show by the quiver of even an eyelash that anything was going on out of the common.

"Some iced coffee, please Simpson," said Uli. "What will you girls have? The same? Very well. Simpson, has Henriette returned yet?"

"Yes, my lady, she came in about ten minutes ago."

Just then Henriette appeared, and took the parasol from her mistress.

"*Ah, mon Dieu, Madame, vous avez chaud, n'est-ce pas? Il a fait chaud là-bas, c'était épouvantable.*"

"I'm so sorry you had to wait there all day, Henriette. One never can tell, you know, when the witnesses are going to be called. I should think you will be the first to-morrow."

They were in the bedroom now, and Henriette was busy with a tea-gown.

"Madame was splendid," she said, with tears in her eyes. "I only hope I shall be as good; I—I would do anything for Madame."

Uli, busy drying her hands, smiled very sweetly at the tearful eyes lifted adoringly to her face.

"Yes, Henriette, I know you would, and you *do*, you know; you help me a lot. Well, try and keep calm, and trust that we may weather the storm. We can't do more than we are doing." She sighed a little, the storm was a very disagreeable one for a woman.

The Frenchwoman knelt down and tied the little

bows on the front of her mistress's tea-gown, and with one pink ribbon between her fingers, she looked up at the beautiful tired face.

"*Quand même,*" she said to herself, as she bent lower and adjusted the bow carefully; "I cannot help wishing Madame loved Monsieur Brett, *il est très gentil.*"

Chapter II

THURSDAY, the fifth day of the hearing of Branton *v.* Branton and Brett, was hot and still, and the sun beat down in the same pitiless manner as on the preceding four days. Every one was exhausted, and even in the stone passages of the Law Courts the heat was oppressive. Wednesday had been taken up with the respondent's and co-respondent's witnesses, and with the three speeches of Counsel. To-day would see the end of this *cause célèbre*, and the court was crowded, if possible, a little closer than on the other days. That nameless pulsation was in the air that is always present in an assembly of people, each unit of which is possessed by a spirit of excitement.

The Judge turned round in his chair and began his summing up, addressing the Jury in rather a low voice. The twelve men sat quite still, only one wrote occasionally with a gold pencil on the paper in front of him. For one hour and three-quarters the low voice went on. Very carefully he went over the points of the case; very fairly he put each matter of importance before them. Lady Branton sat quite still with her hands clasped in her lap, and divided her attention between the Judge and the foreman of the jury. How she hated this latter; she boiled with an unreasonable rage whenever she

looked at the grey beard and pink and white skin, and the mouth with the perpetual smile on it.

> "There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
> And where his glance of hatred fell
> Hope withering fled, and mercy sighed 'farewell'!"

"That man could never have a woman friend," she had said on the opening day, "and he makes a profession of thinking the worst of every one." She looked at the chronic smile now with a feeling of nausea, and then turned her eyes back to the kind face on the bench. The Judge brought forward everything in her favour that was possible. He said how remarkable it was that there was practically no evidence against her but the letter, although for six months she had been watched and dogged by detectives. The petitioner had even introduced Detective Loam into his home disguised as a footman. True, there was the evidence of the servants, but he must warn them that the evidence of servants must be looked at very carefully indeed; his experience (and it had been a long one) told him that the evidence of servants was very little to be depended on, in fact, the jury themselves had heard how one had contradicted himself in that court. As for the letter, if the respondent had written this to the co-respondent, of course it was distinct evidence of great intimacy, greater intimacy than was compatible with the suggestion of platonic friendship alone. The jury had heard the respondent's explanation of this letter, and they must weigh very carefully that explanation taken in conjunction with other things. They had been

told by the learned counsel for the respondent that a man like the petitioner would stop at nothing when he was anxious to get a divorce from his wife, they must remember that the petitioner acknowledged in his cross-examination that he *was* very anxious to be free, but they must recollect that, as a rule, there were some things that a gentleman could not do. He felt sure that he could leave the result confidently in their hands, and that they would weigh every point most carefully. Their verdict would mean everything to the respondent; her whole life would be blighted if their verdict was against her; they must remember that nothing had been breathed against her character until this unfortunate affair; they must take each point and examine it most carefully, and realize that they must judge by facts alone and not by surmises.

The judge ended, and mopped his face, and then retired into his room. The shorthand writer beneath the bench leant back and stroked his black beard; the reporters handed bundles of papers to the waiting messengers. Every one moved and began to talk, and the jury were ushered down the steps to their retiring-room, and the door was shut on them.

The petitioner, Sir George Branton, looked very hot and nervous, and talked in a low voice to his solicitor, twirling a pen rapidly between his finger and thumb. Lady Branton's solicitor bent towards her with a smiling face.

"It is all right; it's bound to be for us; he summed up strongly in our favour."

A little colour crept back into her face; she looked back into the body of the court, and nodded to various friends; Lady Elizabeth West beckoned her to come and talk; this lady was fanning herself violently, and her white hair was fluttering wildly.

"My dear," she said gaily, as she squeezed Uli's hand; "that judge is a dear, I'd like to kiss him."

Uli smiled, not the bitter smile of the last week, for she had hope at last.

"Do you really think it's all right?" she asked anxiously.

"All right? Of course it's all right!" Lady Elizabeth spoke briskly, and threw a challenging look round through her lorgnettes.

A woman sitting behind, a stranger to both Uli and Lady Elizabeth, bent forward and spoke to the former in a low voice.

"Excuse my impertinence in speaking to you, but I must tell you that I think you've nothing to fear, we all think this, and I've heard all the people about, including the odd barristers, saying the same."

Uli gave her a radiant smile. "Oh, thank you so very much," she said sweetly. "I'm more than glad. My solicitor and friends down there say the same."

"And look how nervous the other side looks!" added the stranger, with a wave of her hand down towards the right.

Uli looked down, and her mouth grew hard. Lady Elizabeth looked too, and her faded blue eyes flashed.

"And to think my father and his were friends!"

she said softly. "Old Branton must turn in his grave."

"Wasn't the Earl George's godfather?" asked Uli.

Lady Elizabeth smiled. "Yes, child, and a very bad one, I'm afraid. After all, a silver mug at the christening isn't *everything*, though I believe the poor old dear did throw in a maxim occasionally when George was at school; but the silver mug is the chief thing, that is expected of you, the maxims are not. Dear me, why don't those men come back, they've been away for nearly half an hour already? *I* shouldn't have taken two minutes."

"I'd better go back," Uli said nervously; and Lady Elizabeth squeezed her hand again affectionately.

Uli sat down between her two friends. This waiting was terrible, for the first time since the case began she felt abominably nervous, her heart beat in a suffocating manner right up in her throat, she could hardly breathe, and she was acutely conscious that her hair was far too heavy. Her two friends were in like plight. The American's usually pale face was flushed, Jane Colwyn's robust colour had faded entirely, and she put on her left glove and took it off again as if her life depended on it.

At last there was a sound from the right, and the jury were brought back, and, with much shuffling, took their accustomed seats. There was a slight delay while the judge was fetched, then a breathless stillness.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

"We are."

The foreman's face still bore that odious smile.

"Do you find that the respondent has committed adultery with the co-respondent?"

"Yes."

There was a stifled sob in court, but not from Uli Branton. Her eyes were fixed wide open on that smile, that infernal smile; she pressed her tense figure hard, hard against the wood at her back. Some one was holding her hand and arm—oh yes, poor Dorry and Jane. Why was every one talking still? Oh, of course, something about costs.

Jane Colwyn shook her arm. "Come out now, dear," she said, "before the crowd."

Uli remained upright, still braced against the wooden back.

"Not just yet, dear," she whispered; "I can't walk just yet." What funny tricks her knees were playing her, it was so hot, and yet they were knocking together as if with cold.

But she must go out; it was ridiculous to sit here. Suddenly she rose up.

"Very well, let us go."

She turned round! bother. The gangway was full of people. They made way for her.

She caught Lady Elizabeth's eyes, poor Lady Elizabeth was of a brilliant and most unaristocratic purple with rage. Mrs. Carstairs was wiping her eyes with a very small handkerchief.

Halfway down the stairs, outside the ladies' room,

stood Henriette, her shoulders shaking and her cheeks streaming.

"I suppose it was Henriette who sobbed, how silly," thought Uli. She touched the maid's shoulder gently, "Will you come in here and brush me, Henriette? My dress is awful."

Inside the room she lifted up the tail of her black gown and shook it.

"These passages are disgraceful," she said in an irritated voice, "and this powdered stone is so difficult to get off; this frock will never look the same."

Then Dorry Richards said a very strong word three times very slowly, in a conversational manner, and the phlegmatic waiting-room woman looked shocked.

Uli smiled, she rather wanted to say something herself, only everything seemed so inadequate.

Henriette was kneeling on the floor brushing her dress. She swayed a little. Jane Colwyn caught her arm.

"Don't faint, darling."

She looked surprised, Jane had never called her "darling" before. Jane was so cold.

"No, don't be afraid; I've only fainted twice when I was ill. I don't faint when a *Family Herald* heroine ought to faint. That will do, Henriette. Take a hansom straight home now."

Henriette said nothing, she was beyond words, she got up from her knees, and left the room.

Lady Branton took a powder box out of her pocket

and powdered her nose carefully before the glass, then she handed the box to her friends.

As she went down the steps and across the big hall she met several people she knew. "I must let them bow first:" she thought to herself. They all did bow, and several squeezed her hand. "People don't cut one then the first day!" she said to Dorry; and that young lady sniffed and said nothing.

At the entrance Lady Elizabeth West and Mrs. Carstairs were waiting for her. Lady Elizabeth looked on the verge of apoplexy.

"You drive home in that!" she said furiously, waving her bare hand towards her Victoria. "If you don't, I'll never speak to you again."

"No, no," said Uli. "You're tired; you must go straight back yourself."

Lady Elizabeth looked as if she would turn redder if she could.

"Do as I tell you, Uli, at once;" she stamped her foot. "I wait here a little; I have to see George Branton and cut him before I stir from here."

Dorry beamed upon her. "You're one of God's own, Lady Elizabeth."

"Am I, my dear? I doubt it. Not that I ever believed that God is so narrow-minded as to really expect us to get smacked on both cheeks—and like it! Well, *au revoir*, Uli, I'll come in to tea to-day, whether I'm asked or not."

When Uli descended from the Victoria at Cormor Mansions a shrieking boy, laden with papers, dashed

into her, a large deep orange poster hung down in front of him, in huge letters all over it were the words: "Branton Divorce suit—Result."

"Piper, lidy?"

Uli felt in her purse, and brought out sixpence. "Give me the poster for that," she said, holding it out to him.

The boy grinned. This was good business. He rolled up the poster and gave it to her, pocketed the sixpence and dashed off. Uli ascended to her flat with the poster in her arms; as she entered the drawing-room, she shook it out and held it from her; then she walked across the room and hung it on the wall, fastening it under the bottom of a heavy picture-frame, and turned and smiled at her friends.

"I want to try and realize it, you see," she said in a dull sort of voice; then she stretched her arms over her head. "Oh, I'm dying to get off my things, girls, let's all put on muslin *matinées* for lunch."

Ten minutes afterwards, she appeared at the luncheon table looking infantile in a loose jacket and skirt of white muslin and lace over blue silk.

"I apologize for looking like a dressing-table, but it's the coolest thing I've got."

"You look sweet," said Dorry, resplendent in a thin silk Japanese morning wrapper. "Uli, I've taken the liberty of ordering Simpson to bring us a bottle of champagne. Don't you think it would be nice to drink really *very*, very much?"

Uli blinked at her. "I wonder," she said thought-

fully; "I know men do when anything has gone wrong. But I once was very giddy on a very hot day in a very stuffy room. I only had had three glasses, and the feeling wasn't nice. It seems to me a very overrated pleasure. I want to do something, but I can't quite think what. I think I should like to go to a public execution and watch it very carefully—and I think I should like the victim to be the foreman of the jury."

"Hear, hear!" said Dorry. "I wonder whether he'd still smile."

"Of course he would," said Jane. "He was born smiling. I had a nightmare last night. I dreamt his smile got larger and larger, till it filled the court, and I saw nothing but one huge grin, with all the people sitting in it, and I struggled not to go myself, but had to. I awoke, feeling damp and greasy."

Uli suddenly pushed away her plate, and leant back in her chair.

"I shan't want Henriette this afternoon; you can have her to pack for you two."

They both started, and turned and stared at her.

"What *do* you mean?"

"Mean? Why, you must go, of course—you can't stay with me."

"Why not, pray? Have you got tired of us?"

Uli's eyes were quite hard, and her hands were clutching her table-napkin tightly.

"Don't be a fool, Dorry. You must see that you can't stay with me now. I haven't lost all sense of

decency, though I *am* a *divorcée*. It will be more difficult later on; you had better go to-day."

"On the principle of deserting the sinking ship, I presume?" asked Dorry, in a finely sarcastic voice.

"Exactly. It's mere idiotic sentiment to stick to a ship that has to go under soon."

Quite suddenly, the unemotional Jane laid her face in her napkin, and said "booo-o-o" exactly like a child. Uli stared in absolute surprise.

"I wo-on't go-o," sobbed Jane. Then she dabbed her face wildly with her napkin, knocked down her champagne-glass and broke it, and glared at Uli out of her swimming eyes. "What's the goo-o-d of being a widow, pray, if I can't do as I like? It's no good you talking. I won't go, so there!" and she subsided into her improvised handkerchief again.

Uli looked positively startled. If it had been Dorry, now! She turned to that young lady, and said, with a quiver in her voice—

"Jane will see reason by-and-by" ("I see it now," sobbed Jane); "but you had better go to-day, Dorry."

Dorry poured out a brimming glass of champagne, and lifted it to her lips.

"I do as I jolly well please. You're not a sinking ship, and I'm not a rat," she said, glaring over the top of it at her friend; "and here's to your missing common-sense, Uli. May it soon return to you!" She emptied her glass, then she got up and flung open the door. "The *séance* is ended, ladies; let us adjourn to the drawing-room."

Chapter III

WHEN Lady Elizabeth West arrived, at four, she found the hall door open, and Miss Richards sitting in the hall waiting for her. Dorry put her finger to her lips, and drew Lady Elizabeth into her bedroom, and shut the door.

"What's the matter?" asked that lady, anxiously.

Dorry wrinkled her brow. "I don't know. Uli's most peculiar. Jane and I want you to say something to her."

"But, my dear, what has she done?"

"It's so difficult to explain," said Dorry, plaintively. "She's as hard as nails; she doesn't cry, or anything. She won't talk about it. At lunch she practically ordered us out of the house, only we won't go. She turns the conversation if we begin speaking about it. She's positively flippant. We don't know what to do with her. She gave Henriette notice, and Henriette has been in hysterics ever since."

Lady Elizabeth walked to the window, and looked out.

"It's the shock, you see. Uli is a very peculiar woman, we must remember. She is just the sort of woman to go on like that. I've known her since she was a child, and injustice has always roused the worst

in her. I will see what I can do." She went towards the door.

"Don't let her know I've seen you!" said Dorry, quickly. "Go outside the door and ring."

They tiptoed into the hall, and Dorry shut Lady Elizabeth out, and went back to the drawing-room. Uli was lying on a sofa smoking, and cutting pieces out of newspapers, which were strewn about all over her. When Lady Elizabeth was shown in, she got up and went towards her.

"How awfully good of you to come!" she said, in a "society voice." "Do you prefer tea or iced coffee, or something stronger, perhaps?"

Lady Elizabeth held her friend's shoulders, and looked at her. Uli avoided her eyes.

"Uli, it's no good keeping up this with me."

Uli crossed to the bell and pushed it. "Bring in tea and iced coffee," she said to the maid who answered it.

Then she went back to the sofa. Lady Elizabeth was staring at the yellow poster on the wall; then she went to it, and deliberately took it down and folded it up, and put it on the table. Uli said nothing, and her scissors went "snip snip" in the pale green paper she was handling.

There was silence for a full minute, then Uli asked "if it was just as hot outside."

"Yes," answered Lady Elizabeth, "it is insufferable."

"Luckily, these rooms are fairly cool. The other side of the block is terribly hot. The Dorians live

there, you know. I've always said I wouldn't live on that side for anything. Ah, here is tea. Now, which will you have, all of you, the cold or the hot?" She bent over the tray; she gave each woman a cup, and drank two cups of iced coffee in quick succession herself.

Lady Elizabeth went to the sofa, and sat down beside Uli, and took her hand.

"My dear," she said gently, "don't you think we deserve a little more kindness? We all love you."

Uli played with the scissors. "I—I'm not unkind," she said nervously.

"You don't mean to be, we know that, child; but remember, we have been with you every day through this, and we want to talk with you and see what can be done."

Uli flung out her arms. "What's the good of talking?" she asked drearily. "We can't do anything."

Just then Simpson came in with a letter. "It has just come, my lady, by messenger boy."

Uli took it off the tray with a dull red flush. She tore it open and read it.

"It's from Waddy Brett," she said, when she had done, and there was a little catch in her voice. "Here, you can read it, and see what a man it is that George has ruined."

Dorry read it first, and handed it on to the others. This is what the man said—

"I feel I must write to you, Uli, though what can I say? When the thing first began we laughed it to

scorn, didn't we? Now I am torturing myself with mental cross-examination to find where my fault came in that has led you to this. I must have been imprudent in some way. I ought not to have come so often, but our friendship was so dear to me. I never had one impure thought towards you, Uli. You know that, don't you? My heart aches when I think what I have brought you to. You, in your generosity, will say that it is not my fault, but it must have been; unwittingly, I allow, but I ought to have thought of myself less, then this would never have happened. It *could* never have happened. Will you try and forgive me, dear woman? It will be difficult, I know, but some day, perhaps, you will find forgiveness in your heart, and will let me know.

"You have so many splendid friends who love you and believe in you, and you are a woman who does not care for outside opinion. But, oh, the bitter hardness of it! Try, try and forgive me, and if there is any little or big thing I can do for you, will you, out of the goodness of your heart, let me know it? Remember I was, and am always, your most faithful friend."

After a few minutes Lady Elizabeth spoke in a gruff little voice from behind the window curtains.

"Waddy is a friend to be proud of, Uli."

Uli did not answer. Her elbows were on her knees, and her chin supported on her hands, and she was staring at the plants in the fireplace.

Presently Lady Elizabeth came forward into the room.

"My dear," she began, with a little cough, "if you would only realize how easily people forget. I know, I've seen dozens of these sorts of things. Why, six months (and less) afterwards people say, 'Oh, Mrs. Smith, let me see, wasn't there a divorce or something? She divorced her husband, didn't she? or was it the other way about?' *I* know them—and anyway, as Waddy says, you have some very true friends."

Uli got up from the sofa suddenly and walked to the fireplace.

"My God! won't any one understand?" the passion in her voice rang through the room. "Surely you who know me know that I don't care *that* for the world. Do you think I should mind if it were true? *No*," she walked up and down the room with short uneven steps. "Can't any one see that it is because it is *not* true that I mind? I should never have fought it if it had been true. My love would have compensated me for everything. When I was a child I never minded being punished for a thing I had done. But when I was punished for something I had *not* done I nearly went mad. All my life injustice has been the one thing that has been unbearable. Hasn't my mania—as people call it—against cruelty to helpless things been my great passion? And why? Because of the horrible injustice of it, and now, and now I am suffering it myself. As it is, what have I got for the whole of it? My blood is warm red blood, my heart is a beating living thing. Has one flowed a bit the quicker? Has the other palpitated, suffocated, hurt me? *No*—I am

to pay the price for what? An empty nothing. *God!* Do any of you think I'm a fish? Do you think I haven't been tempted? With all the different bloods I have in my veins do you suppose passion has never touched me? When men made love to me, do you suppose my heart has coolly gone pattity-pattity like a suburban miss when she tells a man he 'really mustn't'? I thought I loved George when I first married. I was only nineteen and that kept me straight, then after—*after*, when I saw I was nothing to him, when he kissed me on the cheek instead of on my mouth, when I saw he was *bored* with me—*me!*—when I realized that he was a mere English roast-beef man with little fancies instead of passions, fancies for a *retroussé* nose, for a neatly turned leg, for dyed hair, when I got to loathe his 'breezy manner,' then—what kept me straight then for four years? Pride, the curious modesty that even the most passionate woman has if she is delicately nurtured. I didn't want to keep straight—I have gone back to my room sometimes after some scene with a man and bitten my hands with sheer impotent fury that I had not for once felt the mad rush of blood through my heart die away in exquisite satisfaction. Oh, I can see you're shocked, horrified—but that's *me*, the me no one knows but myself. I am a woman made for love, love, love, and I've not had it. Not to receive—I want to give, give with the whole of me, with both hands, pour it out, feel—I want to *feel*, and I've never felt, and now, now I've paid the price, paid the uttermost from the worldly point of view for a man

whose lips have never touched mine, who has never made my heart beat faster. I would to God I had been guilty. I would thank him on my knees that the secret was out, and that the world knew me for what I was—I would go to the man and say, 'Take me, I thank you for making me feel. I do not mind the world, there is only you and me.'"

She ended with a sort of gasp, and went quickly out of the room.

The three women looked at each other in silence. Then Dorry got up and went out. She found Uli lying on her bed, sobbing deep horrible tearless sobs with her face in the pillow. Dorry went to her and put her arms round the shaking form, and laid her head down on the rumpled hair. Presently Uli sat up and swept her forehead with her hand. Dorry still held her in her encircling arms, and now she kissed the soft cheek.

"We all understand, dear; we know you, and we all understand."

"Yes, you're a dear, Dorry, and I've been a brute. I'm not a saint, little dormouse, as you know very well. If I were I should bear this better. Those beautiful, injured heroines at the Adelphi turned up innocent eyes to heaven and said that they 'are sure all is for best, and all will be righted some day.' I *can't* say all is for the best, and I *know* it can never be righted, and I *can't* thank God that I am innocent. It makes it bitterer. I am not a saint in any way, only you see I've never flirted with Waddy. We somehow never began in that way. It wasn't goodness, only it didn't arrive like

that. I can feel nothing but a great hate. Dorry, Dorry, will this awful weight on my head never go?"

Dorry took her friend's head down on her breast and stroked the silky curls.

"Hate, dear!" she said bitterly. "I think we are all feeling that. I am nearly certain that if I could I would *kill* George."

The head came up with a jerk. "Ah! I am not even normal about George. I don't hate him. After all he had his object, and it's very pretty. He has only done his best to gain it, and has used all means, fair and foul. I always did prefer a knave to a fool, and George isn't a fool. But I hate those men who believed it; I hate them!"

She flung herself down on the pillows, and clutched them till her knuckles were white, and the strangled sobbing began again.

Half an hour afterwards Dorry came into the drawing-room looking very white and tired.

"You can't see her, Lady Elizabeth. I have undressed her, and put her to bed, and I only hope the chloral I gave her wasn't too much."

"Sure not to be, my dear," said Lady Elizabeth. "But I hope you have hidden the bottle."

Chapter IV

SIXTY-FIVE minutes in the train brought Waddington Brett to the little country station of Royton; his lips were pressed firmly together as he alighted on the platform. It was the day after the termination of the case, and he looked round quickly to see if there were any one he knew, but there were only three villagers who touched their hats to him, and only one of these men stared at him with mouth somewhat agape, but he shifted his eyes quickly when Brett looked at him.

Shorter was collecting the baggage, and his master walked towards the gate; old Miles, the station master, came up limping, and held out his hand; Brett always shook hands with him, he had known him all his life, and he used to steal the station master's apples when he was a boy.

Old Miles coughed nervously.

"Glad to see you back, sir;" then he coughed again. "I'm very sorry for your trouble, sir. It's a terrible hard thing for you. We none of us believe it down here, Mr. Brett."

"Thank you, Miles — yes, it's been a hard time."

"And I am sorry for the lady, sir. I never did like that Sir George, Mr. Brett."

Brett flushed angrily. "We never know our friends, they say."

"Friends!" grunted Miles, with emphasis. "A fine friend! Coming down here, and eating your bread, and shooting your birds, and then doing that. I'd just like to say a word to him, that I would—Sanders has brought the dog-cart, sir," he added, as Shorter came up with a porter and the bags.

Outside the station Brett was overwhelmed with greetings by five dogs of different breeds, ranging from a terrier to a deerhound.

"How's the leg, Miles?" he asked, as the old man hobbled out after him.

"Pretty much the same, thank you, sir. It's about my time to retire, I think. I'm too old to go on with it."

Brett laughed down at him from his seat in the cart, "Oh, nonsense, Miles, you're good for another ten years; we shouldn't know Royton without you here."

Miles beamed with pride, and stroked the cob with his wrinkled hand, then he stepped on one side and touched his hat.

"Good day, sir; mind that Gladstone don't slip off."

Brett waved his whip to him, and the cob went off at a sharp trot. When he turned in at the lodge gates he sat a little more upright and bit his lip; this home coming was rather trying, he found. When he came within sight of the house he saw the form of Neames, the butler, standing by the door shading his eyes with his hand. Brett drew up at the steps and sprang down.

"Very pleased to see you back home, Mr. Waddy," said Neames. That was all he ever did say of sympathy, but he had not said "Mr. Waddy" since the day of the funeral of his old master; and Brett understood.

"There's a power of letters in the library, sir."

A footman came forward, but Neames gave him to understand by a look that he intended to wait on his master himself; he helped him off with his thin coat, and hung it up tenderly, then he followed into the library. He drew up his master's favourite chair to the writing-table, put a paper-knife handy by the side of the pile of letters, brought a smoking-table and put it by the chair, and finally brought in a tray with glass, whisky-decanter, and soda. He opened the soda and put it back on its stand; then he looked round, smoothed a corner of the rug down with his foot, and walked towards the door.

Waddington had watched all these operations with a tender twinkle in his eye.

"Thank you, Jimmy," he said, as Neames went out. That was in return for the "Mr. Waddy"; and Neames understood.

Brett proceeded to cut open letter after letter. There was a letter from his trainer making an appointment for the next day, a few bills, a few business letters, and one or two letters of "sympathy" from friends.

Suddenly Brett flung down the paper-knife, and spilt a lot of cigar ash all over him.

"Confound the cad!" he exclaimed, and frowned furiously at the letter in front of him.

"Pointers Hall, Shropshire,
"*July* 24.

"DEAR BRETT,

"Just seen evening papers with the result. Buck up, old chappie; this sort of thing might happen to any of us. Woman, fair woman is always our downfall. It's damn hard lines to be found out, old man, and we're beastly sorry for you. But I hear the lady's ripping, so you have compensations. Expect you're glad it's over at last.

"Just drop me a line and say whether you have decided to leave in Touch-and-go for the stakes, and if you are backing her yourself. Personally, I think she ought to have a chance, as she's got a pull in the weights.

"Ta ta, old man; see you at Goodwood.

"Yours ever,
"F. MORNISON."

Brett crumbled the letter angrily in his hand, and kicked a foot-stool from him.

"The low hound! However, one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," he remarked contemptuously. Then he opened another letter written in a cramped scholarly hand. He smiled a little as he began it. He feared no repetition of the bad state of Mr. Mornison.

"The Towers, Royton,
"*July* 24.

"DEAR WADDINGTON,

"For the first time in my life I have studied assiduously for a week a certain part of the newspapers. I felt like a society lady.

"It is useless telling you what I think about it. I want to write a learned treatise on 'The Uselessness of Juries'; also on 'The Necessity of Studying the Human Expression.'

"I am sorry for that poor woman with her wonderful face, but one cannot expect a jury to recognize ideals. We seem to spend our lives casting pearls before swine and wondering at their want of appreciation. These silly, stolid good men pass all their time in making the facts fit their theories, instead of their theories to fit the facts.

"'For malice will with joy the lie receive,
Report, and what it wishes true, believe.'

"It's a bad illness, Brett, and, alas! with no medicine to cure it. Well, you're a man and can bear it. It is at these times one realizes the limitations of woman; poor souls.

"Will you come and see me to-morrow? Come to lunch.

"Your friend,
"WILLIAM TAUNTON."

Such is the difference in the point of view! thought Brett. How totally different the same story appears

told by different mouths. "The Ring and the Book" shows that pretty conclusively. It isn't so much that they *tell* it wrongly deliberately, but that they *see* it wrongly. Yes, it is all the point of view. Taunton couldn't take a vulgar point of view; it isn't possible for him, just as it's impossible for Mornison to take anything else. I wonder why "horsey men" should usually be unrefined. It isn't necessary. Horses aren't vulgar in themselves, nor should the mixing with them coarsen men, yet it nearly always does.

He was quite right. How often do we hear the question, "What kind of man is he? Intellectual?" and the answer, "Oh no, he's horsey." Why should not the two things go together? They did in Waddington Brett's case, but he himself felt that it was thought to be rather incongruous. His father had left him the racing stable, and, also, his dying wish, that it should be kept up; and he had kept it up, and had been as "keen" about it as his father had been; also, he very often rode his horses himself when he could ride the weight, and was known in the racing world as one of the best gentlemen-jockeys across country. He never rode on the flat, he could seldom have ridden the weight. But, for all his knowledge and enthusiasm in racing matters, he was not the ordinary racing man as the world understands it. His tastes were as much for literature as for the stable. He had published a history of the Stuarts, which had a very fair success, also a book of essays which had a greater success. And the book, written in collaboration with Lady

Branton, had been a real success, a success that ran into several editions. He also had a very great love of music, and subscribed to the opera, and attended all the best concerts. It was this love of music that had first drawn him to Uli Branton. She was a brilliant musician, a gift inherited from her Hungarian mother; and although Brett could not perform himself in any way, he was a splendid critic and a most appreciative audience.

People were astounded when they found out his versatile tastes, and he was constantly irritated by well-meaning acquaintances who lifted unbelieving eyebrows and doubted that both his tastes could be genuine. The "horsey" people said, "But, of course, you don't *really* care for music and scribbling, you know;" and the literary and musical friends said, "Poor man, why don't you give up your racing stable? It must be such a bore for you."

It was a constant puzzle to him why in England an individual is not permitted to have two sides to his nature. Why a man who is "horsey" must be *all* horsey; why a literary man must not care for horses beyond just a "nodding acquaintance," so to speak. He saw that it was resented, and wondered why. He quite overlooked the fact that the world resents anything it cannot understand. The world has a certain quantity of labels, one for each individual; to use two or three labels for any one man would be inconvenient; it would use up the stock, and some would have to go labelless; that would never do!

"This man is a humorist," says the label; and he has to crack jokes when his heart is breaking, and if by any chance he says a serious thing, the world holds its sides. Is he not a humorist?

"This man is dull," says the label, and though he might be profound as Plato, epigrammatic as Mérimée, it would boot him nothing.

How many great tragedians are lost to the drama because Fate, with a cynical smile, has made them successful in their first part—a comic one? The world sticks its ridiculous little labels on, and the comic man must be always comic, the tragedian always tragic. If the former is tragic the audience roars, if the latter is comic it weeps. Punchinello may sob his heart out, Abelard may bubble with humour, it matters not, the gum on the labels is very strong.

"Give us something we can understand!" cries the world. "Something simple—we have no time in this hurried age to work out problems. We do not want a variety show in one man; men are plentiful."

Chapter V

ABOUT a quarter of a mile as the crow flies from Royton Park stood Sackton House, where lived the "Sacktons of Sackton." They were still that to their large circle of acquaintances, although Sackton no longer belonged to the Sacktons.

"The impecuniousness of the aristocracy is our only distinguishing feature except our feet and foreheads," the Countess used to remark with a sigh.

On July 25 Lady Prudence Sackton sat at breakfast with her father and mother. ("We can, at least, leave the Hermiones and Violets to the lower classes!" Lady Cornaughton had remarked twenty-three years ago at the christening party.)

The Earl was a large man, who looked like a misfit, with a greedy smile and a moist hand. The Countess, well, she lived up to the part. Lady Prudence was "typically English" from her long, narrow foot to her "royal" doormat fringe (four guineas at Truefitt's). Her eyebrows, which were no colour to match her hair, were always slightly raised, her mouth had a plaintive droop, her complexion was good and natural, except quite at the end of the season. At present it was recovering, as they had been back at Sackton House for three weeks, the Earl having caught measles. He was,

consequently, in disgrace with his wife and daughter. Breakfast was usually a silent meal, the *Times* being divided into three portions, the Earl taking "The House," his wife "Society," and Lady Prudence what was left. But to-day they were discussing an item of news of interest to all three.

"What shall we do when he marries the woman, and brings her down here?" asked Lady Cornaughton, plaintively.

Lady Prudence's eyebrows were drawn together in a frown, and she kept her eyes on her plate. Her mother went on talking.

"I'm glad we never knew her in town. A lucky chance. I really ought to have called on her long ago."

"I dislike her hair!" remarked Prudence.

"I rather like it," said the Earl; "and it curls naturally."

His wife and daughter sniffed.

"'Behind the Blind' was good, anyway."

Prudence sniffed louder. "Bah, *she* didn't write it. Mr. Brett wrote it all, I'm sure. It was only an excuse."

"I always thought there was something wrong in that Branton house!" remarked Lady Cornaughton. She sighed deeply and shook her head. The Countess Cornaughton was a sort of human Röntgen ray, she saw the skeleton in everything, and prided herself on it. "One never saw them together."

"It's disgusting!" breathed Prudence. "Disgusting.

She's schemed for him, and now she'll get him. I *am* sorry for him;" and she flushed a little.

Cornaughton coughed. "'Er, I don't see why you should be sorrier for him than for her, Prue." His voice was apologetic.

"What nonsense!" his daughter answered hotly. "She's just a flirt, and led him on. Look how she flirted with Andover."

"All right, my dear; you needn't come down on me like a cartload of bricks."

"Don't be vulgar, dad," said Prudence, severely. She had finished her breakfast, and got up and left the room. She picked up a basket of flowers the gardener had left in the hall, and went into the drawing-room. A quantity of vases and a can of water were arranged on a table. She put down her flowers, and went straight across to a photograph of Mr. Brett which stood on a small table near the window. She picked it up and stared at it, and the tears came into her eyes. "You fool," she whispered, "oh, you fool! Fancy getting yourself into this mess! And she doesn't even care for you. I'm sure she doesn't. You're only one of the rest." She laid down the frame gently and looked out of the window. "The whole place wants doing up," she murmured, "it's going to rack and ruin —and so few men with money are nice."

Then she turned to her flowers.

In the breakfast-room the Countess sighed again. "Poor Prue," she said, "I'm sure it's a terrible disappointment to her."

"Eh, what?" said her husband, startled.

"Well, of course he *was* very nice to her, you know. And the money would have been very useful." She ended inconsequently.

The Earl rubbed his ear with a flabby forefinger, it was a habit of his when he was bothered.

"Well, there are heaps of other men."

"Oh, you know what Prue is! She'll never marry a *nouveau riche*."

"Of course not; why should she?"

"Well, those are the only people nowadays. All our own set must marry money themselves."

"Andover *must* marry money," said the Earl, severely.

"Of course he must!" answered Andover's mother. "I only pray she mayn't smell *too* strongly of oil."

"It's better than pork."

"Oh, I don't know. I hate anything that's grown into a proverb. People 'strike ile,' they don't strike pork."

Cornaughton gave a short laugh. "No, they strike the pig to make pork."

"Really, Cory! How horribly nasty you are."

"Well, my dear, it's true."

"Yes, most nasty things are true, and most true things are nasty. Truth pure and simple is to be avoided."

The Earl laughed again. "'Truth is never pure, and very seldom simple' as What's-his-name said. Anyway, I think we want a little new blood, whether it's

flavoured with oil or pork. We aristocrats are running out. We don't even look aristocratic nowadays. Look at Hampshire, look at Berkton. Sort of retired grocers. And look at *me!* I might be anything, from a small tradesman to a—to a——"

"Company Promoter!" interrupted his wife.

Cornaughton blushed and changed the subject abruptly.

"Such a joke! Andover told me yesterday. You know Alwyn is called the cuckoo?"

"I should call him the sponger," remarked his wife.

"Same thing, my dear. The cuckoo is the greatest sponger known. He's called cuckoo because he adopts other people's homes. Well, old Hampshire met him at the Rormer's on Tuesday, and you know how absent-minded he is? Well, Andover heard him address Alwyn as Cuckoo!" The Earl chuckled. "Alwyn looked up quickly, and said stiffly: 'Why do you call me that?' Old Hampshire never turned a hair, 'Because you're such an indefatigable caller!' said he. Ha! ha! ha!"

The Countess smiled. "Anyway Hampshire may *look* like a grocer, but a grocer would not have had such presence of mind."

"No, I'll say that for us; the breeding comes out somewhere, if it doesn't in our appearance. Anyway Andover is rather decent looking."

"That's *me!*" smiled his wife. "You see, *we* weren't so old."

"Old enough, my dear, old enough. An Anne creation is old enough."

"It's certainly rather a distinction not to have come over with the Conqueror," mused Lady Cornaughton. There was a pause, then she went on hurriedly, "Cory, the doctor says you're free from infection now. It's hardly worth while going back to town, is it?"

"No, certainly not!" said her husband, much relieved.

"Well, dear, I think I shall ask some people down next week. Er—I hope you'll let me have *nice* people —I don't think we need ask any of the Board this time."

The Earl wrinkled his forehead and stroked his ear. "Well, I *ought* to ask Dawson."

"Oh, my dear Cory!" gasped his wife, "I really don't think it is necessary. I couldn't possibly ask the Berktons and the Dorningtons if that man is to be here; he wears such terrible smoking suits, and he's so very —er—so very *genteel.*"

"He's certainly rather trying, and he still persists in pronouncing us Cor*nor*ton sometimes. Well, perhaps I needn't ask him this time. But I must soon; I *must* keep him in a good temper."

Lady Cornaughton sighed. "It is a terrible trial, this Board."

"Yes, my dear, but where should we be without it? A thousand a year *is* a thousand a year. And that is all the use one's name is to one nowadays. And after all the Company is straight! You can't say that for all of them. Look how poor Hampshire got let in. He had the greatest difficulty to smoothe down the judge."

The Countess shuddered. "Yes, I suppose you are lucky, as things go. A man is known by the Company he promotes. But the whole thing is horrid, perfectly horrid."

"Well, there it is!" said her husband, rather irritably. "Unless I did that Andover certainly couldn't stay in the Guards."

Lady Cornaughton walked to the door. "Well," she said, with her hand on the handle. "I will ask about ten down. Any one you'd like?"

"Yes, ask old Braughton. It's a good opportunity. She's gone to her daughter in Cairo, you know, so he'll be able to come alone."

"For these and all other mercies!" murmured the Countess as she went out.

Chapter VI

ULI slept for fourteen hours, and the long rest did her more good than any amount of medicine would have done. She awoke at half-past seven, and lay quite still with a delicious feeling of lassitude. She did not even think, but enjoyed the sense of absolute rest. Never had she felt so free from strain during the time she had lived in the flat; the flat she had taken soon after leaving her husband's house on the day the citation had been served on her, falling like a thunderbolt on the woman who had suspected nothing. The long dreary waiting for the case to come on had sapped her strength more than she knew, and coming on top of that was the terrible strain of the last week; and almost worst of all had been the break of the Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, with the case undecided, and that awful idleness, when she felt she could settle to nothing. The going to bed each night only to lie awake and think and plan ridiculous plans which were discarded the next moment. The waking in the morning with her brain oppressed by a deadly weight of anticipation. She had thanked Heaven again and again that she was not a "woman of nerves," otherwise she would have broken down altogether.

What a curious complication the female mind is!

Occasionally in some great crisis the weakest woman is found stronger than the strongest man. It had been so with Uli Branton. Never once had she allowed herself to despair. All the trying week she had remained calm and reliant, encouraging her friends, keeping up flagging conversation with a tender gaiety that endeared her to them more than ever before. Not one of her most intimate friends but would willingly have suffered much to save her distress, and Dorry Richards, with all her flippant *insouciance*, would have died for her.

At eight o'clock on that Friday morning Uli's bedroom door opened very gently, and Dorry's face, framed in loose hair, peered round it at the bed. She had come thus five or six times during the night, and each time had seen with satisfaction that her friend was sleeping like a child, and had retired as softly as she had come. Now she met the gaze of the wide-open grey-green eyes and came forward to the bed.

"Good morning, chick," said Uli, sleepily. "It's I who have been the dormouse this time, isn't it? Haven't I slept ages? What time is it?"

"Eight o'clock," answered Dorry, smiling happily; "you've slept fourteen solid hours!"

Uli laughed. "How absurd! But then I've often read of people sleeping a ridiculous long time after a shipwreck. My shipwreck was yesterday," she added quietly.

Dorry got up and pushed the bell. Henriette appeared, neat as ever, but with swollen eyelids.

"Henriette, Lady Branton and I will have breakfast

here, as soon as Simpson can bring it," said Dorry, in execrable French. Henriette's English was better than Miss Richard's French, but that young lady said she wanted practice!

"Henriette," said Uli, raising herself on her elbow, "I was very unkind to you yesterday, I hope you'll forgive me? and I hope you will stay with me; you have been very faithful and good to me." She was a fine linguist, and her accent was nearly perfect.

Henriette flushed joyfully. "I will stay with Madame till I die, if Madame will have me," she answered quietly; and then she left the room.

"Poor Henriette!" sighed Uli. "I was positively beastly to all of you yesterday; I think I was crazy."

Dorry stooped and kissed her. Just then Jane Colwyn entered the room in a fussy white wrapper.

"I've told them to bring my breakfast here too," she announced, after kissing her friends; and she sank into an armchair.

The three women chatted on many subjects during breakfast; and after it had been cleared away Uli lay back on her heaped-up pillows puffing lazily at a cigarette. Dorry was smoking, too—Jane did not smoke; she often said she envied those who could, but "personally she preferred a rough channel crossing."

Uli sighed. "Well, girls, we must hold a council of war," she said at last. "I must go away soon for a few months. I can't stay here and have various females coming 'to see how I take it.' I want to go right away from it all."

"Of course you do," said Dorry, energetically. "Where shall we go?"

Uli puckered her brows and spoke musingly. "Well, I thought I should like to visit my mother's country; I have often wanted to go to Hungary. Would it suit you two? It would not be very expensive."

"Lovely!" cried Dorry. "I believe it is a most beautiful country, and if all Hungarians are as fascinating as you, who are only half or a quarter Hungarian, I shall just dote on them."

Jane fidgeted, and hesitated. "I should love to come, Uli, but the truth is I can't afford it. No," as Uli turned to speak, "I know what you're going to say, but I couldn't let you pay; you will not have any too much for yourself, especially as you have this flat on your hands."

"That's nonsense," said Uli, quickly; "I intend to let the flat. I shall put it in the agent's hands at once."

"Yes, but it isn't let yet," argued Jane, "and probably it won't let now at the end of the season. No, I won't let you pay a penny for me, much as I should like to come with you. I think I had better pay some visits while you are away, I am getting into hot water with every one. I must go to Emma for a month; she wrote very crustily the other day." She made a face at the thought; and Dorry laughed.

"I pity you, Jane," she said. "I have never seen your sister, but I can quite imagine her and her good husband."

Uli smiled. "I expect you will get a long lecture,

Jane, for being so imprudent as to contaminate yourself by my society."

Jane shrugged her shoulders. She did not say that she had already had a letter of three sheets from her sister to that effect. Her clergyman brother-in-law had also written.

"Anyway I have to go sometime, and I suppose this is the best time," she answered; and she looked very bored at the idea. "Then there are the Greenaways; I have promised them a visit for months, and the Crosstons, and various other people. You won't think I am deserting you, Uli?" she ended wistfully.

Uli put out her hand and patted Jane's tenderly. "I should be an ungrateful fool if I thought that, dear. But I do wish you'd come, I can quite well afford it, and if the flat lets I should have no difficulty at all."

"No, Uli. You're a sweet, generous angel; but I've quite made up my mind. If you had stayed here nothing would have made me go as long as you wanted me; but Dorry will take care of you abroad, and when you come back I will come and stay again for as long as you like. When do you think you can go?"

Uli lit another cigarette and thought a moment. "Well," she said hesitatingly, "I should like to get away as soon as possible, but I'm afraid I shan't be able to for a few weeks. There's such a heap of things to settle up. There are the lawyers I must see;" and her mouth grew hard; "then I must get some clothes, as I intend to stay abroad several months, and that means winter, and I have no warm things except my

sables. Then I must wait a bit, to try and let the flat, and must pack away my pet china and things in the box-room, and send the silver to the bank, and all sorts of things. If I let the flat, it must be with the servants. I won't let otherwise. I shouldn't like my things destroyed by strange servants; and, besides, there's Aristotle. Simpson adores him, and will take care of him. By the way, where is he?"

Dorry went to the door, and called "Arry, Arry." There was an answering "cr-r-ru," and a large, black, and exceedingly wise-looking cat marched into the room, jumped straight on to the bed, and started carding his mistress's chest, and purring loudly while she stroked and scratched his head.

"You lamb!" said Uli, tenderly. "I'm going to leave you for a time. I know you will be upset; but bring your usual philosophy to bear on it, and try and remember I shall come back as devoted to you as ever."

Aristotle rubbed a moist mouth against her chin, and then lay down on her chest, with two black arms stretched out by her neck, still curling up his hands with a rythmic motion. He took no notice of the smoke which curled round his head—he was used to it.

"Well, I suppose we must dress," said Dorry, yawning. She had had a disturbed night, but would sooner suffer torture than say so. "We must go round to all the agents this morning, and we'd better begin settling the things you want to pack up; it's no good leaving everything to the last moment." Then she hesitated a moment. "Look here, Uli," she said

quickly. "I shouldn't refuse to see people who call if I were you. People are such mean beasts; they'll say things, sure as eggs is eggs, if you don't see them—say you're afraid, and things. I know it will be horrid seeing some of them; but remember, there is some wheat among the tares."

Uli got rather red. "Yes, dear," she said meekly. "I think you're right, though why I should see them, or mind their saying things, I can't imagine for myself. I am done with. But I'll see them for your sakes. There, I know what you're going to say; you're a lamb. Run away and dress, both of you, and we'll go round to the agents before lunch."

That afternoon Uli went down alone to Lincoln's Inn Fields to see her lawyer.

The junior partner, who managed her affairs, was a little round, bright man, who always reminded her of a Cheeryble brother in appearance, only he was relentless to his enemies, however affable to his friends and clients. He was very cross to-day; he had lost a big case, and no lawyer likes doing that. He was gentle enough in his manner to Lady Branton, though, and rolled forward a large leather-covered chair for her, with its back to the light.

"It's a nasty business, Lady Branton," he remarked, turning over some papers on his desk, "a nasty business. We did all that it is possible to do, I think; but they were too strong for us—one thing must be a consolation to you, the consensus of opinion was decidedly in our favour. A great many persons spoke to me, and

—er—I think you would at least be less—er—worried if you could have heard what they said."

Uli sighed. "Oh yes," she said vaguely; "but, you see, that does no good to me exactly. However, it's done, and it can't be helped. Now, I want you to arrange about the costs."

Mr. Cobb opened his eyes a little. "The costs?" he questioned. "They were given against—er—the—er—against Mr. Brett, of course."

Uli clasped her hands tight. "Quite so," she said gently; "but I wish to pay my own particular costs. I wish to share with Mr. Brett."

The lawyer got up. "But, my dear lady," he said rather impatiently, "it's quite unnecessary—quite unusual."

"The whole thing is unusual," Uli answered firmly. "Mr. Cobb, I intend to do this, so please arrange it. I suppose I cannot pay all the costs. Mr. Brett must pay his own lawyer and counsel, but my costs and my—and Sir George's I intend to pay. I feel responsible for the whole thing. I ought to have been cleverer, and seen what Sir George was working up for, and I am *not* going to allow Mr. Brett to pay it."

Mr. Cobb was walking up and down the room with his hands behind him. He hummed and hawed a bit, and then burst out.

"It's really *very* unusual, Lady Branton; it's never done, and, besides, Mr. Brett is very rich. He can afford it better than you. You have no money to throw away, you know."

Uli sighed impatiently. "That's neither here nor there. The point is that I insist on paying. I wish you to arrange this as soon as possible, Mr. Cobb, please, as I want to settle up before I leave town. I am going abroad as soon as I can get all settled."

Mr. Cobb suddenly seemed to realize that it was no good arguing with an obstinate woman, so he sighed and sat down again.

"Very well, Lady Branton, I will arrange it as soon as possible. After all, it does not much matter; in six or seven months it will all regulate itself," he said, with a twinkle in his eye.

"What do you mean?" asked Uli, looking puzzled.

The lawyer smiled broadly. "Well, the decree is made absolute in six months you know, and well, of course, hum—er—probably the following month will see your marriage, it is usual to wait a——"

He was interrupted by Uli, who sprang to her feet with an exclamation.

"What *are* you talking about?" she said rudely. "Are you mad?"

Mr. Cobb did not like this, and innocent of offence, he frowned at her.

"My dear Madam, please calm yourself," he said sedately. "I am but referring to your marriage to Mr. Brett, which will doubtless take place next January or February;" and he placed the points of his fingers together, and looked at her over his glasses.

Uli did try to "calm herself," but she was furiously angry.

"Mr. Cobb," she began quietly, but with rather a trembling voice, "please do not say anything like that to me again. You know, or you *ought* to know, that I have told you the truth about this case. I do not love Mr. Brett, and he does not love me, and we shall not marry."

"Will not marry!" Mr. Cobb almost screamed. "But you *must* marry. You'll *have* to marry. The world expects it of you. Why—why, Good Lord! whoever heard of such a thing. You'll both be free. You *must* marry. It is *usual*."

"*Usual!*" said Uli, with deep scorn. "*Usual!* That's your fetish. It's not mine. I do not intend to marry Mr. Brett, never—never, and the world can say what it likes."

"It will!"

"Let it; I don't care. I should not think of marrying to please the world, so there! You can say what you like, the world can say what it likes."

She was on her feet, and pulling angrily at her gloves; her face was unusually flushed, and her eyes were flashing.

The little lawyer stared at her as he might stare at some strange beast. Then he spoke soothingly.

"Dear Lady Branton, I quite understand you are upset over this terrible affair, I sympathize with you most deeply. Go home now and rest, and I will arrange everything as you wish."

He spoke as he would to a fractious child, and his client noticed it. She fixed him with her angry eyes.

"You think I am unbalanced," she said severely; "you think I don't know what I am talking about. I *do*. I shall never change my mind. I will not be thrown into the arms of this man just because it's 'usual.' I don't want to marry him, and he doesn't want to marry me. Good-bye, Mr. Cobb, please let me know directly you have arranged things; you must sell out the Great Northerns and pay what is necessary. Please do it all as quickly as possible, as I want to get away. Good-bye!"

She drove home, still trembling with fury, shut herself up in her room, and refused to see any one. Miss Richards and Mrs. Colwyn talked over this with Lady Elizabeth West, who called, but none of them could guess what had occurred to annoy her.

Chapter VII

"MY dear Uli," Mrs. Carstairs exclaimed as she rustled into the drawing-room the next afternoon, "I do hope you're feeling all right? This heat on top of everything is enough to drive any one mad."

Uli kissed her friend; she was holding Aristotle under one arm, and that important personage looked rather offended at being disturbed. Mrs. Carstairs bent and kissed his left ear, which he flicked sulkily.

"Isn't he a lamb?" said Uli, smilingly. "He simply won't move from me now; I'm sure he knows I'm going away."

"Ah, I saw Lady Elizabeth last night, and she told me you were going. When do you go, and where?"

"As to when, we're not quite sure; as soon as I can settle up everything. We shall go to Paris first, and stay a few weeks; or rather I think I shall go to Versailles, as Paris isn't thrilling in August. Then, about the middle of September, if it's cool enough we shall go on to Budapest. It's no good going there if it's too hot, no one would be in town, and I want to see some of my mother's people—if they'll see me," she added gravely.

"Of course they'll see you!" said Jane Colwyn.

"I'm not so sure," said Uli, musingly; "not if they've heard all this."

Mrs. Carstairs coughed. "Dear Uli, don't get it on the brain. I know the whole thing's hateful; but everyone is not puritanical nowadays, thank Heaven, and the whole thing will be forgotten and done with in a month or two. People will probably remember it good-naturedly for a moment when you marry; but they——"

Uli sprang to her feet, upsetting Aristotle ignominiously on to the floor.

"*Et tu, Brute!*" she exclaimed.

"Er—what? what? My dear Uli, how you startled me! Did Arry scratch you?"

"No, *you* did!" said Uli, quickly. "Look here," she continued before any one could speak. "Mr. Cobb made me very angry yesterday by suggesting this same thing, and I hope no one else is going to do the same. My temper is not my best point, you know, and it makes me quite ill to get in a rage."

"But what's the matter? What have I said?" sighed poor Mrs. Carstairs. "I only said people would remember good-naturedly for a moment when you married. I don't think that's unkind. I didn't say it nastily or anything." She looked so puzzled and upset that Uli cooled down somewhat. She sat down again and began to stroke the cat. She paused for a moment, then she began to speak rapidly, and it was easy to see that she was trying hard not to lose her temper.

"My dear people, I want you all to understand fully and once for all that I do not intend to marry. No,

don't interrupt me please. I know all the arguments, I had them all yesterday. It is 'usual,' that is the chief thing, I believe. But I don't intend to do 'usual' things in the future. I've done 'usual' things up to now to please the world, and the world has used me as a football. Now I'm going to do *un*usual things to please myself. I'm not going to be tied; I'm not going to make myself miserable to please the world. Of course I shall be most frightfully sorry if you all cut me (here Dorry snorted loudly), but I am, after all, of paramount importance to myself. I am nearly twenty-six, and I have never been really happy except for the first year of my married life, when George was decent to me, and I thought I was in love. I am certainly not going to be driven into another unhappy marriage just to please the world. Oh, I know what you want to say, Ada, that Waddy Brett is not a George. I know that, but much as I like Waddy and he likes me, we are not in love with each other, and we do not want to marry each other. I shall not marry again unless I find that I love a man as I know I am capable of loving. I don't want any of the 'lapdog loves that whine'; I want a tremendous thing, and I'm not going to marry unless I'm sure of it. But I intend to enjoy my life now as I never have done. I'm not going to put up a 'trespassers will be prosecuted' board any longer. I'm not going to watch 'behind the blind' any longer. You all read our book, and you all know what I mean. I'm sick to death of the world and the 'usual.' What have I got for it all? This!" and she took up and

waved a large mass of newspaper cuttings. "This is how the world has rewarded me for doing the 'usual,' for pressing down and putting the hatches on all my natural feelings, and now I'm going to see how I shall be rewarded for—the other thing; it can't be worse."

The three other women remained silent for a few moments; then Jane said rather huskily—

"Dead Sea fruit."

"Perhaps," answered Uli, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Anyway I'm going to see. Every one is so fond of saying, 'This beautiful luscious-looking fruit is bitter inside'; I'm going to judge for myself. Personally I'm not such a cynic as to think that every beautiful thing is rotten inside; I have generally found the contrary."

Mrs. Carstairs was fidgeting. "But, dear girl," she broke out, "every one will take it for granted that you are going to marry Mr. Brett, and you will find that they will say it to you without a thought, just as I did."

Uli sighed profoundly.

"Yes, I suppose so. Will you please tell every one you know that I am *not* going to marry him? That will save me a lot of trouble, as you know nearly every one I do. I find it rather exhausting to have to reiterate the same thing over and over again. *Please* stop people if you can."

"Very well," Mrs. Carstairs said abruptly. "I will do what I can, but I warn you, they won't take my word for it. And as to all the other nonsense you talked, Uli, I can quite understand; you're bitter and worried now,

my dear, but, for goodness' sake, don't be a fool. It's all very well to amuse yourself, and have a little relaxation after all this, but don't talk such tomfoolery about the 'unusual,' it won't pay."

Uli laughed rather bitterly. "Won't pay!" she repeated. "Won't pay in your worldly coin, I suppose you mean? Well, I've changed my coinage; the worldly coin does not suit me any longer. I'm going to build a mint of my own, and strike my own coins; the other's out of date, it is no longer valuable to me, and my coinage will be so much more artistic than the old. I shall have no copper, except perhaps new copper (that's beautiful), but the moment it's got dull it will be called in. No silver, that's cold; but all gold, beautiful, glittering, finely wrought gold. What nonsense I'm talking! Well, we'll see. Tell me, have you heard how poor Georgie Bailey is?" She turned the conversation deliberately.

Just as Mrs. Carstairs was putting on her gloves, preparatory to leaving, Lord Andover was announced. He was a tall, good-looking young man, the two most noticeable things about him as he shook hands were his eyebrows and his elbow: the first were very thick and given him by nature, the latter was cultivated.

"That young man amuses me," said Uli, as she saw Mrs. Carstairs out of the hall door. "He's such a thorough fool, and he takes himself so seriously; but he's very good natured."

She went back to the drawing-room smiling, but she looked serious at once. Miss Richards was standing

looking out of the window, she was rather suspiciously intent on something outside. Mrs. Colwyn was searching in the music-stand, and was also very intent on her task, though she was chattering away about "Florodora." With his back to the plant-laden fire-place, in an Englishman's characteristic position, stood the hope of the Sacktons with an agonized stare on his face, and just beyond the rug, bolt upright in front of him, sat Aristotle, gazing at him solemnly. Uli took in the whole group with one comprehensive look, and she gave a very slight giggle.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said quickly; "I quite forgot he was in the room. It's too bad of you, girls; you might have seen to it. Come, Arry, come to Simpson."

She took the black bundle up in her arms, and went out of the room. Lord Andover looked immensely relieved, and relaxed his strained attitude.

"I'm aw'fly sorry, you know, Lady Branton," he said, as Uli came back. "I can't help it, you know. All my mother's family have the same loathing for cats; it's evidently hereditary."

Uli had heard this explanation at least a dozen times, and she made her usual answer—

"Yes, I'm sure you can't help it. I suppose it's like some women and mice."

Dorry had come away from the window, still with a twinkle in the corner of her eye, and Jane came forward with a piece of music in her hand, looking quite serious.

Andover sank into a chair, with his long legs

stretched out, and sipped the whisky and soda Simpson brought him.

"I wonder when this heat will go," he said, sighing. "Those barracks are simply insufferable at night. You are fairly cool here, I must say. I say, Lady Branton, I've brought the Panhard round, hoping you'd go for a spin, all of you. It would do you good; it's the only way to get a real breath of air. Do come; we can get a couple of hours before we need dress for dinner."

"It's really sweet of you to think of it," said Uli, gratefully. "What do you say to it, you two? Oh, I forgot. Jane hates motoring; she won't go, I know. Will you come, Dorry?"

"I will come later," said that young lady, "if you can fetch me in Burlington Street at six. But I must go to Dela's now, or I shan't get my dress. I have an appointment at five-thirty, you know, and I shan't be there now till a quarter to six. Now, would it bother you at all to fetch me?"

"Not at all, of course not. I tell you what. You dress, both of you, and Lady Branton and I will drive you down; then we'll take a little turn and come back for you. How'll that do?"

"Capitally. Come along, Uli."

"I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Colwyn," said Andover, as he was left alone with Jane. "You'll see the error of your ways some day, and become as enthusiastic as any of us."

"Not I," answered Jane, laughing. "If I drove myself I might perhaps like it some day; but having

nothing to do, and just to sit there and wait for some one else to kill one! Ugh! I think it's horrid. All you motorists are so conceited; you run the most fearful risks, just because you think it's rather smart to get through a tight place where no one else can."

Andover laughed heartily. "Oh, my dear Mrs. Colwyn, you're very hard on us. Why, I've never had one accident" ("Touch wood!" cried Jane), "and I've been driving for two years. Of course I've been fined; but then, every one's fined except the King and those sorts of people. I say," he went on after a slight pause, "how's she getting on?" nodding his head towards the door.

"She's better," said Jane. "We made her sleep on Thursday night, otherwise I think she would have been really ill. We were all frightened at first."

Lord Andover twirled his moustache furiously. "It was a beastly shame," he exclaimed. "You've no idea how sorry I was. 'The law's a ass.' I really think it's high time something were done. It's too bad. Oh, here you are. You look ripping, Miss Richards."

Dorry made him a little curtsey, and went on fastening her gloves.

"I think why so many women are devoted to motoring is because the veils are so becoming," she remarked, smiling. "Now you must hustle, or I shall be fearfully late."

They did "hustle," and Miss Richards was dropped at her dressmaker's, barely late at all. The other two went on for a little turn, and as Lord Andover turned

the car slowly into Bond Street, there were standing on the curb, waiting to cross the road, two women, beautifully dressed, and one of them, at least, very pretty.

"There's Lady Dolpane and her sister," said Uli, just before they came to the corner. "*Isn't* she pretty?"

The car went very slowly by them; Uli could have touched them. She bent over with a smile on her face, ready with some everyday remark, Andover held his hand half raised to his hat, when the pretty woman deliberately raised her lorgnette, examined the car, raised her eyes to Uli's face, studied that, yawned slightly, and looked away.

Lord Andover gave a quick turn to the wheel, and nearly had his first accident. He muttered several words under his breath hardly proper. The blood had ebbed slowly away from Uli's face, and left it like a mask. She clutched her hands tightly together, and stared straight in front of her. Then, as they turned into Piccadilly, she laughed.

"That's the first time I've been cut," she said, with mock gaiety. "It was so stupid of me to let her do it. I forgot, you see. It's so difficult to remember always." She stole a glance at the furious profile next to her. "I'm very sorry, Lord Andover, to have led you into this; but—but—possibly you think it rather 'dog' to be seen about with me. It never struck me."

The car swerved dangerously, then he slowed down and turned his head towards her.

"Look here, Lady Branton, I don't deserve that!" It was a hard, young voice that spoke. "I may be a fool, but, at least, I'm not a d—er cad. I was quite as angry as you just now, and I only wish they'd been men, that's all."

"I don't think men do that sort of thing quite like that, do they?" said Uli, bitterly. "But it was my fault," she went on. "You see, I forgot. I oughtn't to have given them a chance. Well, it's not pleasant to one's pride. I'm glad I'm going away."

"I wish you wouldn't be so bitter," said Andover, gently. "It's only a few hounds who think like that. Good Lord, look at the dozens of people one knows that there have been awful scandals about—every one forgets. Why, you'll be all right in a few months; the decree, whatyoumaycallum, is in six months, isn't it? and then——"

Uli put out her hand. "Please, stop," she exclaimed. "Before you go any further, I'd better tell you that I am not going to marry Mr. Brett. It appears the world will think we ought to marry, but I am not going to, so, please, will you tell every one you know?"

"By Jove! I say, you know, do you mean that?"

"Of course I mean it," said Uli, wearily.

"By Jove!" repeated this young man of few phrases, "my sister Prue will think she has some hope when she hears that. She's always been rather mashed on Brett, you know."

"Well, let her marry him. I don't want him," said Uli, rather impatiently. "I like Waddy immensely, as

you know, but I'm not in love with him, and never shall be."

She got rather red now, the whole thing was so embarrassing to her.

The car spun along quietly for a few minutes, then Andover spoke again in a conversational and utterly unsentimental manner.

"I say, you know, as you're not going to marry Brett, what do you say to me?"

Uli gave a little laugh. She could not help it. "My dear boy, don't talk nonsense," she said gently.

"It's not nonsense!" said her companion, indignantly. "I mean it. I've always been most aw'fly fond of you, you know. Will you marry me?"

His hand shook a little, and the car went perilously near the wheels of a brougham.

Uli looked at him. She had never seen him look so serious.

"No," she said, very quietly. "You're a good sort, my friend, and I thank you sincerely; but I cannot marry you. I shall not ever marry, unless——" She paused, then she continued quickly. "We'd better be going back for Dorry now, hadn't we?—or would you rather drop me *chez moi?*"

Andover turned the car. He took no notice of her last question. He did not speak till they turned into Bond Street again, then he said quietly—

"I shall try my luck again some day."

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Chapter VIII

MANY books have professed to follow the complicated workings of a woman's mind, but even with the most intimate knowledge it is indeed difficult. Even the many diaries given to the world leave one doubtful if the exact psychological convolutions have been told in all their entirety; even a Marie Bashkirtseff may have occasionally unconsciously added a picturesque touch, may, with the turn of a pen, have made a glittering dewdrop appear a diamond, or a goose a swan. If Uli Branton had been asked at this time to put the innermost thoughts of her mind on paper, she would have been puzzled, her mind was more or less chaos. A great bitterness and a great revolt were the most noticeable features, and also a great obstinacy. It is almost impossible, whatever people who know nothing at all about the matter may say, to follow the arguments in a child's mind, but perhaps it may run occasionally like this: "I've been punished for something I haven't done, something I'd like to have done, only mother told me not to; as I'm punished whether I am naughty or good, I may as well be naughty, it's more fun!"

This idea, more or less complicated, was what was going round and round in Uli's brain at this time. Her

manner was no different, she was just as charming to her friends, just as gay apparently as she had always been; but deeply underlying all her *insouciance* was a perfect and obstinate determination to do as she chose in future. After her one betrayal to Mrs. Carstairs and her two visitors, she said no more about it, but her mind was none the less fixed on having her own way. Those five hot days in the Law Courts had made a kink in her nature that it would take tender handling to smooth out. There are some dispositions that are ennobled by injustice and suffering; Uli's was not one of them, she was very human. Perhaps the depth of her feelings added to the difficulty. The mixture of blood in her veins complicated matters. Her father was of an old untitled family, Irish as to name and bringing up, but his mother had been Spanish. He again had followed his father's example and married a foreigner, a very beautiful woman whose father had been Hungarian and mother Italian. From this mixture of races had sprung Uli, an only child, with all the charm and ability which so often results from mixed blood, but she had to pay for the charm and ability with an intensity of feeling and a passionate desire for happiness that the homogeneous are usually spared. Her mother had died when Uli was ten, to her great sorrow, and her father had been her great friend until he was killed in a railway accident, on his way to visit her eighteen months after her marriage. An overwhelming regret and agony of mind had been hers at this awful tragedy, and for six months she shut herself

up and refused to see any one. Then she had taken to her long discarded talent of writing, and she wrote steadily for a year, giving to the world a few delightful poems, many stories and sketches, and one book. Shortly after this she had met Waddington Brett, and intellectually *en rapport* they had worked together with a keenness that was a delight to her. Their first collaborated book had been a great success, and another was in course of construction when Sir George Branton had upset the world, as far as his wife was concerned, by taking the first step in the long process by which he had succeeded in ridding himself of his wife.

One of her chief sorrows about the whole concern was that it put an end to a friendship she really valued.

"I can never feel or act the same to Waddy in future," she said sadly; "George has spoilt it all."

Therefore, when the maid came to her in the box-room one afternoon in the first days of August and told her that Mr. Brett was in the drawing-room, her cheeks burnt with a slow crimson as she answered—

"Tell Mr. Brett I'm very sorry, but I can't see him."

She remained with her arms in the box she was sorting and gave a little sigh, and Aristotle, who was seldom absent from his mistress, jumped on her shoulder and rubbed his nose sympathetically against her hot cheek.

Simpson returned with Mr. Brett's card, on which was written in pencil—

"Please see me for five minutes, it's very important."

She got up from her knees looking worried. "Mrs. Colwyn and Miss Richards have not come in yet?" she asked.

"No, my lady, Mrs. Colwyn said they would not be in to tea," said Simpson, gently.

"Very well, I suppose I must—er, tell Mr. Brett I will come in a minute."

She went to her room, and took off her apron, washed her hands, and did mysterious things to her hair; then, feeling very uncomfortable, she entered the drawing-room, she shook hands without lifting her eyes, and sat down with her back to the light. Her usual flow of conversation had gone, she said nothing. Brett looked at her for a moment or two, then he said—

"Uli, what is all this nonsense about costs? Sir James wrote to me yesterday, saying your lawyers had insisted on paying all the costs except my own personal ones."

Uli got painfully embarrassed. "Please, Waddy," she pleaded, "don't make me any more wretched than I am by arguing the matter; I had it all from Mr. Cobb. I ask you, as a friend, to let me have my own way in this. I shall never be happy again if you don't."

Her hands clasped each other in a nervous, pitiful way, and she lifted her eyes to his for the first time. Brett was nearly as embarrassed as she, and he coughed and fidgeted.

"But, Uli, how can I? It was as much my affair as yours, and the costs were given against me."

"I know, I know," said Uli, plaintively; "but—oh, *can't* you see what I feel about it? George was the cause of the whole thing, and, after all, I ought to have known him and warned you. I *must* pay these costs. I should never have a moment of self-respect after if I didn't. Waddy, you," she blushed again and hesitated, "you wrote you would do anything if I asked you—I ask you this. Please don't disappoint me. I can't bear it."

He got up and went to the mantelpiece. "I—oh, it's awfully hard, Uli; I hate it."

"I ask it," very softly.

"Very well, as you put it like that, I suppose I can't refuse; but I *hate* it."

"Thank you, Waddy; and, as you have been so good, please grant me one more favour—never mention the subject again if we meet."

"If we meet!" exclaimed Brett. "What do you mean? Of course we'll meet; you're not going to cut me, are you?"

Uli turned and looked out of the window. "Oh, I'm going away for a time, you know, and when I return I don't know what may happen and—er——"

The man walked over to her, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Uli, in six months you will be free. Will you marry me?"

Uli started violently and looked almost frightened. "Why, why—what—who told you to say that?" she ended, choking.

"No one told me to say that."

There was the slightest possible emphasis on the "told," and Uli noticed it. She got up and began walking about, as her manner was when she was very agitated.

"No one *told* you?" she repeated; "no, but some one suggested it. Oh, I know; I've had to go through with it all myself the last week. Waddy, how can you be such a—such a blind idiot? You know I don't care for you in that way." She swept her hair back from her forehead and sighed. Brett was doing irreparable damage to a palm, and he did not look up.

"I would try and make you happy," he said, in a very low voice.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't talk like a good young man in a book. My dear Waddy, I thought you were more—more—unconventional than to come here and propose to me just because the world thinks it's the correct thing for us to marry. Make your poor, puzzled old brain easy, my friend; I have no thought of marrying you, and nothing would induce me to. I've said this to people the last week till I'm positively tired. It's very dear and nice of you, Waddy, and I'm sorry I was cross. You've done the right thing according to man's code of honour; but, luckily for you, I don't intend to accept you."

"No; but, Uli, the world will be beastly, you know, and, after all, we both live in the world."

"You do," said Uli, impatiently; "but I'm going out of it. I'm sick of it all. As for you, you can say I refused you, and the world can say nothing."

"But don't you think we could be really happy?" continued Brett. "We have always got on so well together, and we have nearly everything in common."

Uli laughed, her sense of humour was seldom far from the surface.

"Oh, you ridiculous person! Do stop, Waddy; you've done your duty, and I really can't stand any more. I'm not going to marry a man just because a silly set of interfering worldly busybodies say I ought to, so please let's change the subject. As a friend you're perfect, and as somebody else's husband doubtless you would be inimitable; but as my husband"—and she made one of the little foreign gestures that came natural to her.

Then she went over to him. He was sitting down now in his favourite chair, his elbows on his knees, and leaning forward. She patted his shoulder affectionately.

"You're a dear good sort, Waddy," she said softly, "one of God's own, as Dorry would say, and if I loved you as I could love I should consider myself lucky to have you as a husband. I really don't know why I never have loved you, you're such a lamb! I do hope you will be happy; luckily you're a man, and to men all things are forgiven. I hope some day we may be pals again; at present it's impossible." Then she hesitated a moment, and went on softly, "I have never kissed you, Waddy, but now—take this as a symbol of my respect for you, and as a *requiescat in pace* to our past;" and she bent and kissed his cheek.

Brett sprang to his feet and caught her shoulders.

"Uli, do marry me," he said rather unevenly. "I —I *want* you to."

Uli laughed up at him. All her unwonted shyness was gone now, he was just the good friend she had always known.

"Oh, you dear old thing!" she exclaimed, patting his arm; "you really do it very well, but don't say any more about it. There, 'the subject is closed,' as a pompous old man always says. Let's forget it, and be chummy and nice."

The man had a curious light in his eyes, and he still held her shoulders.

"Uli, I *want* to marry you. I didn't before, I own— But I do now. Don't you think you could? I shouldn't worry you."

Uli slipped from his hands and sat down. "Oh dear, oh dear!" she said plaintively; "you men *are* so funny. You're just like children. Deny you something you don't really want at all, and you're immediately seized with an overwhelming desire for it. What *is* the matter with you, Waddy?"

Brett did not answer. In another moment Uli had rung the bell for tea and whisky, and the "subject was closed," as she had remarked. But although he stayed for another half hour his eyes still held a rather curious expression, and he was somewhat *distrait*, and gave absent-minded answers when Uli talked; and when he poured some hot water into his tumbler to weaken his whisky and soda, Uli began to be seriously alarmed.

PART II

THE SWEET

"And my people ask politely
How a friend I know so slightly
Can be more to me than others I have liked a year or so;
But they've never heard the history
Of our transmigration's mystery,
And they've no idea I loved you those millenniums ago."

ANON.

"The forest knew you and was glad,
And laughed for very joy to know
Her child was with her; . . . .
. . . . .
This was the welcome that you had
Among the woods at Fontainebleau."

ARTHUR SYMONS.

"He looked at her, as a lover can;
She looked at him, as one who awakes;
The past was a sleep, and her life began."

BROWNING.

"Hold and have, there and then,
All her body and soul
That completes my whole,
All that women add to men,
In the clutch of my steady ken."

BROWNING.

"Emilia—no jealous toy
Concerning you.
Desdemona. Alas, the day, I never gave him cause!
Emilia—But jealous souls will not be answer'd so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they're jealous: it is a monster,
Begot upon itself, born on itself."

OTHELLO.

"Your fairy prince, beneath the crown,
Showed but a mean and bestial face."

ALICE HERBERT.

"The blow . . . is but weak:

. . . . . .

But when the heart suffers a blow,
Will the pain pass so soon, do you know?"

BROWNING.

"You were just weak earth I know:
With much in you waste, with many a weed
And plenty of passions run to seed,
But a little good grain too."

BROWNING.

Chapter IX

"OF course it's delightful that one is allowed to walk here," said Uli; "but it ought not to be. There ought to be a king and queen here; my sense of the fitness of things is offended."

Uli Branton and Dorry Richards were standing at the top of the terrace steps at Versailles, and from a long contemplation of the wonderfully laid-out park they had turned to gaze again at the palace.

It was a warm afternoon at the end of August, and Versailles, although not looking so exquisite as it does in its spring dress, was beautifully fresh and sparkling; a shower of rain in the night had washed the dust from grass and trees, and polished the little pebbles of the paths, and even the huge dignified palace looked refreshed.

Uli and Dorry had arrived the week before, and, after stopping for three days in the hotel, had managed to secure a charming little villa, furnished, for a month. Dorry called it their "arbour," and really it was scarcely larger than an arbour, one sitting-room, two bed-rooms, and a slip of a room for Henriette, who did not in the least mind the indignity; all was *couleur de rose* in her beloved native country. An excellent *bonne à tout faire* came in by day, and they had their meals on a

wide covered balcony that ran the whole length of their abode. The two women were delighted with it; true, it was small, but very comfortable, and with the dearest little garden it was possible to see. They knew, later on, when they began to travel, their money would go quite fast enough, so they were economizing while they could. They came every day to the Palace or the Trianon, and Dorry, who had a very pretty talent for sketching, would draw endless "fascinating bits," as she called them, while Uli read aloud to her, poetry or prose, as the case might be. To-day they were on their way to go down one of the rays of the numerous stars of shady walks which constitute the scheme or design of the park. In the centre of this, their adopted star was a broken, moss-grown statue of Mars, and Dorry had seized the idea for a sketch, and had begun it the day before. She was going to call it "Mars in the Wars," which she considered a pretty play of words.

When they arrived, they settled down with their back to the railings, and Dorry got out her painting-materials and set to work. They were sitting just where one of the walks entered the centre. All was peace; it was too solitary for the nurses and children, who are very gregarious, and collect together in crowds much nearer the palace, to chat and work and play. It was delightfully cool beneath the shade of the huge trees, and the birds were singing sleepily.

"Please read," said Dorry; and Uli awoke from her daydream, and opened the book on her knee. She had chosen Swinburne to-day; it was a "Swinburne" day,

she said, and Dorry had agreed with her. They both knew the poems nearly by heart, but, of course, that made no difference to them.

Uli read one or two pieces; then she read "The Leper," and broke down in the middle of it. Dorry sniffed sympathetically, and waited for her friend to go on. The terribly tragic, simple verse flowed on again, and Uli ended it with a great catch in her pretty voice. Both women remained quite silent for some minutes, Dorry laying the colour with sympathetic brush on the pathetic broken arm of her Mars.

"Read the 'Triumph of Time,'" she said presently. "I'm never tired of hearing it."

Uli began softly. The beautiful, sonorous, alliterative verse fell on the air like music; reading poetry was one of Uli's chief gifts, and perhaps her favourite occupation. She read perfectly. She hit the happy medium between a singsong rhyming, and, what is as great a fault, the slurring over of every rhyme until the verse is made to read as prose, a fashion far too prevalent amongst old-fashioned reciters. When she had finished the poem, she looked dreamily straight ahead, and repeated slowly—

"You have chosen and clung to the chance they sent you,
Life, sweet as perfume, pure as prayer.
But will you not one day in Heaven repent you?
Will they solace you wholly the days that were?
Will you lift up your eyes between sadness and bliss,
Meet mine, and see where the great Love is,
And tremble and turn and be changed? Content you;
The gate is straight; I shall not be there."

She paused a moment, then she went on musingly, "That's how it is, you see. If we miss seeing 'where the great love is' we may never have a chance again; he may 'not be there.' And then, do you think 'they will solace us wholly,' these days of goodness, these days of self-repression? No, not me, anyway; my eyes would be lifted up in complete sadness, and not even a touch of bliss. I should wring my hands in agony, and think how I had missed life. Would any harps and angels satisfy me, then, do you think?"

Suddenly, from behind them, at the opening of the alley they had come down, a man's musical voice began speaking. Both the women started; they had heard no footstep. They did not get up, nor interrupt; there was something compelling them to silence. The voice went on gravely reciting two verses—

"Joy is so rare! Why throw away
The favours that the Gods have given?
We are but human, who's to say
What joy is sent from Hell or Heaven?
The moments are so very few,
So few for living!
The hearts so scarce that ever knew
The pow'r of giving.

"Oh, take your joy, and hold it tight,
And live each moment that is flying.
The Gods are jealous, and the night
May come, and find our sad hearts sighing!
Each throbbing joy that's very near
Is worth the folding
Close to our trembling souls, for fear
Of no more holding."

Uli gasped. "Who wrote that?" she said quickly. The man came forward and leant against the fence without speaking. Neither woman thought of convention; the whole thing was so sudden, so unexpected, so like a fairy tale.

"I was listening to you reading. It was a great treat; do you mind?"

"Who wrote that?" repeated Uli.

The man only smiled.

"You did?" said Uli. "Ah!" Then she studied him. He was a man very difficult to describe. A little like Napoleon, a little like Byron, and a touch of Edison, she came to the conclusion, a strong face, and a refined face. He was dressed like an ordinary Englishman, and was of medium height.

He came forward. "May I sit down?" he said, suiting the action to the word. It was impossible to object; he took everything so for granted, there was no thought of rudeness in his mind, one could see that. Simply he was one of Nature's children, and convention was not a word in his dictionary. He leant forward and looked at Dorry's nearly finished sketch. "I like that," he said gravely; "poor Mars, he's very lonely here. You've got a touch too much umber in that arm, it is so cold in this light you can almost do it in black and white, the merest touch of umber will do it. Keep him cold—cold and deserted in the warmth of the summer, do you see?"

Dorry did see, and looked wonderingly at him. "Are you an artist?" she asked, as she scraped out the arm.

"Yes," he answered simply; "I'm Talmere."

Both Uli and Dorry looked interested. There was no conceit in the simple announcement; if he had said "my name is Talmere," it would have sounded more forced. Every one knew his name, and he quietly took it for granted that they knew it.

"Oh!" said Dorry, and turned her sketch face to the easel. Talmere laughed.

"That's quite unnecessary," he said. "It really has a lot of talent in it. You've got the *idea*, that's the great thing. I will show you where you're wrong if you like. Look!" and he turned the canvas towards them again. "You see you have this shadow here just a bit too hard; you must pass your brush across the edges." He took one of the brushes from her hand, and with a master stroke softened a shadow. "I like your idea, and I like the way you've carried it out; you've got atmosphere, you've got mystery. I think there's too much cobalt in that tree." He continued with technical details for a few minutes, not like a great master, as Dorry said afterwards, but like one friend to another with equal talent. When he had finished she thanked him warmly.

"It's real good of you," she said enthusiastically; "how you can bother to try and correct my wretched little efforts I can't make out."

He smiled brightly. "Oh, that idea is all wrong," he said gravely. "We all do but what we *can;* and everything every one does, as long as he does it as well as he can do it, is equal in the sight of the Muses.

Supposing each one left off working because he was not as good in his particular work as some one else! Why the world would become very dull very soon. We should have no artists, because each artist was not a Rembrandt, no writers because each writer was not a Shakespeare, no poets because each poet was not a Homer or Virgil. Oh no, it would never do. Remember what Ruskin says, 'The greatest thing a man can do is to *see* something, and tell what he saw in a plain way.' That's what each of us is trying to do, isn't it? You see your solitary deserted Mars in this green haunt, *I* saw my 'Via Dolorosa'; we each do the best we can, and I'm sure the gods see and know, and count all equal."

Uli was leaning forward, with her hands clasped round her knees, looking up at him with sparkling eyes.

"Oh! what a comforting theory!" she exclaimed. "Then you think a poor flower girl by the fountain in Piccadilly, doing up her buttonhole with her head on one side, is equal to—to you, for instance?"

"Certainly," said the man, laughing; "only she must do her *best*. If she puts in a leaf that falls the wrong way because she is too lazy to look for another she is not doing her best, any more than I should be if I left out a difficult shade because it was just as easy to put something else; or you, if you made one of your written characters do something uncharacteristic because you thought that incident would look well in the chapter, or played a false note because it was too much trouble to practice a difficult passage."

Uli looked startled. "My characters? My music?" she stammered. Did this man know who she was?

Again Talmere laughed musically. "Oh, I only guessed!" he said. "We artists know, or ought to know what people's talents are."

"She writes and plays divinely!" said Dorry, warmly.

Uli shrugged her shoulders. "As well as I *can*," she smiled whimsically. "You've made me feel better about it, though; it's a very comforting theory, yours. I shan't feel so sick about my work again. I shall just try to do my best."

She looked dreamily up one of the paths, and the artist's eyes studied her keenly. "I must paint you; I must, I must!" the artist was thinking, and "I must know you!" the man was thinking. It was odd that not one of the three was feeling in the least uncomfortable. Talmere had that curious capacity of making every one think a thing was all right because he did it, from the first moment when he had added himself to the group neither of the women had thought for a moment that it was unusual; and as for the man, he was Nature's child and did just what he wanted to at the moment, without any thought. If he saw a beautiful flower in a private garden he walked straight in, and was utterly unembarrassed if the owner found him admiring it; if he heard a conversation that interested him he joined in; if at a reception he saw a man or woman he wanted to know, he went up to them and spoke, and no one ever minded; the most that any one

said, and they were usually the dolts, was that he was "eccentric."

> "And Nature, the old nurse, took
> The child upon her knee,
> Saying, 'Here is a picture-book
> Thy Father hath written for thee,'"

might have been written of Ivor Talmere.

Uli turned to him after a few minutes' silence. "Are you staying here?" she asked, "or only down for the day?"

"No; I've got a little villa and studio here. When it gets too hot in Paris I usually come down to some place near—here, or Fontainebleau, or somewhere handy. I never go to Brittany with the crowd. Coifs are very pretty, but they're overdone. If I go away I go right away. Last year I went up the Nile; but this year I was in the middle of a picture, and as I have exactly the same light here as in Paris, I'm continuing it here."

"What——" began both women, quickly; then they stopped. No artist likes to be asked what he is doing, except the few who do nothing.

Talmere smiled. "My picture is called 'Poor rushes for such little feet," he said; there was never any affectation of secrecy about him. "That is why I could not help listening just now when you were reading it; it is such an extraordinary coincidence (if there are such things). You must come and see it; it is nearly done."

"Oh!" exclaimed Uli, "I shall cry; I never can even read that poem without crying."

"Yes, I know; I saw you. No wonder; it's one of the most pathetic poems ever written. Well, I won't describe my picture; you must see it."

"Thank you," she said simply. "I think you know that we shall appreciate and understand it."

In a few minutes Dorry started packing up her easel and brushes and strapped the whole together. It was one of those fascinating modern inventions for travelling painters that put the most things into the least possible space; her stool took to pieces, and the seat of it strapped itself round the whole paraphernalia, making a neat canvas parcel. The sun was almost setting now, and they all three started to walk out of the grounds.

Talmere walked with them, carrying Dorry's luggage. Somehow they never expected him to leave them with a hat-lift at the gate. He walked home with them.

At the entrance he lifted his eyes to the house. "Oh, you've got Madame Bourdain's villa," he said. "It's a gem; you're lucky." He hesitated for about three seconds; then, "May I come into the garden?" he said.

He did not wait for their consent, but followed them in. Easy wicker chairs were standing about, Dorry sank into one and fanned herself.

"What a lovely copper beech that is," said Talmere, "and that green beyond. Yes, you're lucky to have found this." He heaved a contented sigh and sat down with his hat on his knees. Uli had gone into the house, and she now came down the steps and joined them, she had taken her hat off, and the man looked at her hair

with longing. After an hour he got up lazily. "Will you come and see my picture to-morrow?" he said.

"Yes, with pleasure. What time?"

"You'd better come about four," he answered. "I have cleared up all the mess by then, and the model has gone. I've brought my own model down from Paris, and he's lodging in the town; but I've nearly done with him. In fact, I really don't want him any more; but he's such a poor weakly wretch, and the country is doing him good. Come at four, then. There is my address." He handed Uli his card. Then he held out his hand. "*Au revoir!* I have thoroughly enjoyed my afternoon," he said frankly.

Uli laughed a long ripple of laughter. "It's so like him to go without even asking our names," she thought, and she called after him—he had already reached the gate—

"You may as well know your prospective visitors' names," she said gaily.

"Oh yes," said the man, quickly turning; "I quite forgot."

Both the women laughed. "My name is Branton, and my friend is Miss Richards."

He bowed in a stately sort of way. "Thank you, thank you for everything. You've been awfully kind to me," he ended boyishly. Then he opened the gate, waved his hat to them, and went out.

Chapter X

TALMERE received his visitors with a bright smile the next afternoon.

"How awfully jolly of you to come," he said heartily, as he shook hands. "Now, my inner conscience tells me that neither of you are devoted to tea, so I've provided a 'cup' which is my own particular secret; it was taught me by a Turk, and if you don't like it, I shall not have a very high opinion of your taste!"

He handed each of them a long glass, which tinkled gratefully on such a hot day, and on top were floating strawberries (little *fraises des bois*) and strange green leaves. Talmere watched them like an eager boy as they took their first sip, and was rewarded as they both exclaimed 'delicious!' He handed them cakes and some delicate *foie gras* and caviare sandwiches.

"How do you manage these?" asked Dorry, as she took one of the latter. "We have an excellent *bonne*, but she has no more idea of making sandwiches than a cow."

Talmere smiled. "She's my own housekeeper," he explained. "She's been with me ever since I first came to Paris, and I sent her down to the English pastry cooks to be taught one or two things that Frenchwomen can't usually do. It's certainly not much that one wants

of English cooking," with a wry face, "but savouries, sandwiches, toast, and beefsteak-puddings are necessary to me."

"This 'cup,' as you call it, *looks* very innocent, but I begin to suspect it!" announced Dorry, solemnly.

"I suspected it at my first sip," said Uli, "and now I more than suspect. Mr. Talmere, there are 'strong waters' in this 'cup'?"

Talmere laughed like a child who has played a naughty trick, and rubbed his hands.

"Never mind," he said teasingly. "You're not teetotalers, are you? and it's beautifully cooling. It doesn't intoxicate, it only exhilarates; that's the beauty of it. If I'm ever really fagged out, I concoct myself that 'cup,' and I'm immediately as fit as possible, and there's no reaction."

He put their glasses down for them, then noticing both their faces turned longingly towards his huge easel, which was turned facing the wall at the end of the room, he smiled.

"All right," he said, as if in answer to a question; "I do hope you'll like it. It's not quite done yet. I finished the figures to-day, but there are various details to be attended to. Do you mind sitting in those two chairs under the light; you can see it best from there. That's right. Now I'll wheel it forward."

The easel was already screwed down, and the picture at the level most convenient for seeing it. He turned it round and wheeled it forward, then went and stood beside Uli. Neither woman said a word. They both

leant forward with their chins on their hands and their elbows supported by their knees.

The picture was sublime in conception, and of course the technical details were carried out in the masterly way all the world knew.

The interior of the poor "wattled house" was quite dim except for a shaft of light that fell on the figures. The floor was covered with worn discoloured rushes. On a shelf was a pitcher and a drinking-cup of horn, and a bundle of grass with "dropping seed" hung over from it. A rough stool against the wall. No other furniture was there except the hard pallet on which was the figure of the leper. She was lying straight along it, as it was straight along the background of the picture. Behind the pallet at the foot was kneeling the "poor scribe," with his arms round her feet, quite hiding them; only their form could be seen through the draperies of his wide, coarse, brown sleeves which fell across them. His thin knotted hands were clasped round, as though he guarded those little feet from the whole world. His hood had fallen back from his head, and he was looking up towards her face with the most noble love and pity on his emaciated features. She was dressed in a curious dull reseda green long straight robe, it was wound tight round her beautifully formed body and legs; her head was raised on a hard rough pillow of straw, and all that could be seen was her hair, "half grey, half ruined gold." Both her arms were raised, and the draperies of her long sleeves she was holding in front of her face to hide it from him. Though there were no

features to be seen, no skin anywhere, yet in the whole attitude of terrible shrinking there was a fearful agonized shame (had not all men but this one found her "a plague to spurn away"). It was as though she were saying at that moment—

> ". . . Be good with me; I grow
> So tired for shame's sake."

or—

> "I pray you let me be at peace,
> Get hence, make room for me to die."

And in answer her poor scribe was looking nothing but the most perfect love, as though he were thinking—

> "They cursed her, seeing how God had wrought
> This curse to plague her, a curse of his.
> Fools were they surely, seeing not
> How sweeter than all sweet she is."

The tears welled up in Uli's eyes and fell down her cheeks slowly, and by-and-by Talmere noticed them; he stooped and picked up her handkerchief that had fallen to the floor. He put his arm round her neck and lifted her face and dried her tears gently; then, with one glance at Dorry's averted head, he bent and kissed her eyes.

"Thank you for those tears," he said gently; "they are the greatest thing in the way of praise that Swinburne or I have ever received."

Dorry turned round, blowing her nose hastily. "Oh," she said, "oh! there are no words for it! It's worthy of the subject, and that is all one can say. That figure

of shame, and that face of heavenly love will haunt me for ever."

"What lines are you going to put under it?" asked Uli. "Don't you think 'Cold rushes for such little feet' is too short? Remember how ignorant the public is."

"What do you advise?" asked the man.

Uli thought a moment. "Give me a pencil and piece of paper," she said. When she had them, she wrote—

"Found her a plague to spurn away.
* * * * *
"I hid her in this wattled house,
I served her water and poor bread.
For joy to kiss between her brows
Time upon time I was nigh dead.

"Cold rushes for such little feet—
Both feet could lie into my hand.
A marvel was it of my sweet
Her upright body could so stand."

"There," she said, handing the paper to him. "If that is not too long. It will explain to the ignorant, you see."

"It shall be done," said Talmere, gravely; and he put the paper away in a drawer.

He came back, and wheeled the easel again to the other end of the studio, and placed it as before, with its face to the wall.

There were few pictures in the room, only one or two nature studies he had made down in Versailles, and an unfinished head of an old man. The studio was fairly

large but bare of all but a few rugs, some comfortable chairs, and an old bureau.

"I'm afraid you won't find anything interesting to look at here," he remarked, as Dorry wandered about looking at his sketches. "You see, this is only my abode for a month or six weeks; I bring nothing down from Paris with me. You must come and see my studio in Paris if you will. I return in three weeks. How long do you stay?"

"Till the twenty-first," said Dorry; "then we go to Paris for a week."

"And then?"

"To Budapest."

"Oh, I hope you will be returning to Paris some time." His voice sounded rather disappointed.

"I don't know," answered Dorry. "It depends on Lady Branton."

He started a very little, but answered quickly, "Well, I hope Lady Branton will be merciful, and give poor Paris the honour of her presence again."

Uli laughed. "Oh yes, we're sure to come back here," she said; "every one returns to Paris who once knows her. We shall probably return in December, then I shall certainly return in the spring; I always do. Tell me, your picture is for the Salon, of course?"

"No," answered Talmere. "I am going to send it to the Academy. Swinburne is an English poet, and I think it ought to go to the English exhibition."

"Have many people seen it yet?" asked Dorry.

"No, not many; and those few are very angry with me." He smiled whimsically.

"Angry with you; why, what do you mean?"

"Well, you see, the craze just now is to paint as ugly things as one can find. You must on no account paint a picture that 'tells a story,' they call it 'cheap art.' Mythology they don't mind, and allegorical subjects, but anything modern is wrong, and they call everything modern, even the middle ages, like that."

"Oh, how ridiculous!" cried Uli. "I've heard men talk that nonsense, and I can't stand it. I had a huge argument with an artist a few months ago about it. I can understand their contention when one thinks of the 'pretty pretty' style of picture like 'A lover's quarrel,' and that sort of thing; that *is* cheap art, but where does the cheapness come in here?"

"My dear lady, I am entirely with you; but they argue that a thing need not be beautiful to be well painted."

"Quite so, that's what this man said. But *my* argument was this—given two paintings both equally well painted, one of a common square duster nailed upon the wall, and the other of some really poetic incident, which would be the more interesting from all points of view?"

Talmere laughed. "And what did your artist friend answer?"

"He answered to the effect that undoubtedly the duster would, as it would show such cleverness on the

part of the artist to be able to paint such an uninteresting thing with such perfect ability."

Talmere shook with laughter. "Of course he did! They all do. They have a positive horror of the beautiful, this modern French school. Look at the models. Good heavens, when I was studying at Julien's, the favourite model, the model raved about was a thin, gawky woman, with her elbows almost out of the skin, the vertebræ showing distinctly, bumpy shoulders, high stomach, and no breasts; she always stood in the same attitude, with her hands clasped together under her chin and her elbows in, as if she'd just had an involuntary bath and was shiveringly waiting for some one to dry her."

Both women laughed heartily.

"Oh, I can see her," said Dorry; "but *why* was she a favourite?"

"Oh, they raved about her 'lovely colouring'—she was a dirty drab colour, and her 'simple curves'; there were no curves, it was all angles. No," he went on impatiently, "there is a lot of rot talked nowadays; it is a phase, they will doubtless get over it. In the meanwhile I placidly go on my way, and say I prefer to paint the beautiful in the flesh or the spirit, and consequently I incur the odium of most of my artist friends. But I survive. Of course I sometimes paint uninteresting things; but, then, I paint them because they fascinate me. One of my pictures two years ago in the Salon pleased the artists immensely. They patted me on the back for it—you see, it was purely technical."

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"Which was that?" asked Dorry. "I was in America that year."

"And I was ill," said Uli, "and couldn't come."

"Oh, it was called 'L'Atelier,' it was a studio with no one in it; quantities of canvases turned to the wall, and an easel with a canvas on it, in which a great hole had been knocked, and over everything was dust as thick as you can imagine. Dust struck me as so wonderful one day, and so I painted that, and the modern crew were pleased."

Uli looked thoughtful. "But even there there was a story, *n'est-ce pas?*" she said doubtfully; "the artist unsuccessful, dissatisfied, gone, who knows where? perhaps to the Seine."

Talmere laughed rather grimly. "Yes, but luckily they missed that idea," he said cynically, "or they would not have been pleased. If I'd called it 'The Forsaken Studio" it would have done for it. It would have 'told a story'; oh, shocking!"

"Yet Millet made his mark in his generation, poetical as he was," mused Uli.

"Yes, and they've been trying to obliterate the mark ever since," answered Talmere.

"I'm glad I'm not an artist," said Uli, gravely.

"Ah!" answered Talmere; "but we've seen the same thing in literature, only luckily it was not so severe a phase. There are still many people who only like the ugly and the sordid in their books. The realistic school they call themselves! Do you think they for one instant admire 'La faute de l'Abbé Mouret'

as much as they admire 'L'Assommoir'? No, one they consider 'pretty pretty,' not worthy of a great master, the other they think a work of stupendous merit—as it is in its way."

"I call it the cult of the ugly," said Miss Richards, firmly.

"Exactly; that's precisely what it is. Goodness! some Frenchmen carry it to such a pass that they even choose their mistresses the ugliest they can find. There is a famous dancer in Paris who has finer pearls than any but four women in Europe, the finest carriages and horses, the finest mansions. Why? She is so ugly one shudders when one sees her; she is not even well made. Bah! the whole thing disgusts me. Will you have another drink after all this heated discussion? As for me, I feel I need one."

They accepted gratefully, and Talmere told them a little of his life in Paris.

"I never 'razzle' much, I find I can't work properly if I do. I always give myself a holiday on Sundays, I think it good to have one day off from work. You must really come to my studio. There are one or two things I'd like to show you, and one or two men I'd like you to meet."

"We'll certainly come, won't we, Uli? I just love a studio; one always feels so at home there, though I guess one would always feel at home with you, Mr. Talmere."

He laughed. "I hope so, sincerely; if any one tried to be stiff with me I shouldn't know what to do

with him. I hate stiffness. Lady Branton, I want to ask you a favour. I've seen several poems of yours in various magazines. I want you to let me see all you've written, if you have them here. Will you? Please don't refuse, it would give me such pleasure."

Uli blushed slightly. "I would certainly, if I had them here," she said; "but, you see, I've left everything of that sort in London."

Dorry laughed. "A less conceited woman you never knew," she cried gaily. "But luckily I can oblige you, Mr. Talmere; I have a book with all Uli's poems, and shorter stories, and things pasted in. But if you lost it I should never, never forgive you," she added severely.

"Thank you a thousand times. I shan't lose it. I think a person who loses a lent book is a cad. When may I have it? May I come for it to-morrow?"

"Come to dinner to-morrow," invited Miss Richards, impulsively. "We dine at seven; don't dress, we dine on the balcony, or in the garden; and our *bonne* would have fits if any one turned up in evening dress."

Talmere looked at Uli. "Yes, do," she said quickly.

"Thank you, I shall be delighted. But surely you need not go yet?" he added, as they got up.

"Do you know what time it is? Nearly seven now," said Uli. "I can't apologize for staying all this time, and I don't expect you want us to?"

"No, certainly not! I'd no idea it was so late. Thank you immensely for coming. Take care of that step. *Au revoir*, then, *à demain*."

That night, when Uli was in bed and just about to blow out her candle, she suddenly looked straight ahead of her with the candle-stick in her hand. Her pupils dilated.

"Oh!" she gasped. "I'd forgotten. He kissed me! and I did not say anything." She remained holding the candlestick for a full minute. Then, "What does it matter?" she said. "And why should I pretend any longer? I *liked* it!" Then she blew out the light.

Chapter XI

THE next evening Ivor Talmere enjoyed himself as thoroughly as he always did. He was a happy pagan, and had a theory that he carried out all through his life. He never went anywhere where he knew he should not enjoy himself; he never knew people unless he liked them. Whenever any one accused him of selfishness he answered: "My dear chap, don't you see it is true unselfishness? If I don't like people, they are sure not to like me, therefore they would be as bored with my society as I with theirs. What is the good of inflicting unnecessary unpleasantness upon any one?"

If he could help any one, or do any good, that was a different thing. His charities and kindheartedness were unlimited, it was only where so-called "pleasure" was concerned that he made his hard and fast rule, and stuck to it; but however objectionable to him they were, people who were in trouble of any kind that he could alleviate, always found him on the spot, to help with money, advice, or work; and that he called selfishness, because he "liked helping poor wretches out of messes." This evening was one after his own heart. He announced, as soon as he shook hands, "I hope you don't mind selfish people? Because I'm going to be thoroughly selfish to-night, and I trust you have a real

old-fashioned idea of hospitality, Lady Branton, namely, to amuse your guest all you know? Because I'm going to demand a lot."

And after dinner Uli played to him for an hour, and Dorry sang, and after the music he pleaded, till Uli consented to read aloud.

He heaved a sigh when he could no longer ignore the voice of a very loud clock strike in the hall, and reluctantly got up to go.

"I hope you will take pity on a lone bachelor?" he said, as he bid them good night, "and let me come in sometimes after dinner? My evenings down here are very lonely. I know one or two fellows, but they have no thoughts beyond bridge or poker; and though I adore bridge (I hate poker), I don't want to play it every night. By the way, do you play?"

"Oh yes, of course we do. We both play rather well!" modestly declared Miss Richards; "we might have a game of cut-throat sometimes."

"I know one very decent chap here I might introduce to you if you will permit me; he plays very well. He's a Frenchman of good family, and loves being very English."

"I hope he speaks English?" asked Dorry, somewhat alarmed. "I speak French, of course. Oh, you needn't smile, Uli, but I certainly like to play bridge in English."

"Oh yes, he speaks very well; in fact, you would offend him if you spoke in French. May I bring him, Lady Branton? He's thoroughly respectable."

"Certainly, bring him one day, if you like. We don't play high, you know."

"Nor do I; one or two francs a hundred is quite enough to amuse one's self with. Well, good-bye, and a thousand thanks for your hospitality; you have thoroughly entertained me."

This was the first of many pleasant evenings. Sometimes the Frenchman came in, and they played bridge. M. Landreau was an inoffensive little man in very English clothes, very courteous, rather shy, and played bridge exceedingly well; he was a lieutenant in the regiment stationed at Versailles, and sometimes he came in uniform, but more often in mufti; he thought it "so English." Sometimes, on very hot evenings, they took walks; once or twice M. Landreau drove them in his motor. But more often Talmere alone would come in, and they would have a quiet evening with music and books.

Never once, since that first afternoon at the studio, had Talmere done one action that was unconventional as far as Uli was concerned. She used to be rather puzzled sometimes; she wondered if he found her no longer interesting. Once when they were all three sitting silent on the balcony after dinner with their coffee and liqueurs in front of them, she studied his face very attentively; he was stirring his coffee, absent-mindedly staring at his cup.

"I don't believe," Uli thought to herself, "I really don't believe you knew you kissed me. I believe you just did it on the spur of the moment, unconsciously."

Suddenly he lifted his eyes and looked straight into hers, then he shook his head.

"Oh no," he said, and went on stirring.

Uli blushed crimson right up to her hair.

"What did you say?" asked Dorry, waking up from her dream.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, I was only thinking of something," said Talmere; and Uli got up and leaned over the balcony, and tried to cool her hot face in the night. What an uncanny way the man had of reading her thoughts! It was not the first time, but the others had not mattered, only little things, such as mentioning a poem she was just thinking of reading, or referring to some walk they had taken when it was in her mind; but this! She would not have had it happen for the world. However, he made no further reference to it, and in a few days her uneasiness vanished.

After a fortnight, Talmere announced that his greatest friend was coming down to stay the remaining week with him. He had often mentioned him; he was a very rising artist, a Roumanian with an English mother, Telbesco by name, and exceedingly musical. The man came down, a typical artist of the better class, charmingly unaffected, delightfully inconsequent, with the spirits of a boy of ten, and the humour of a satirist. He was brought round to the villa on the first evening by Talmere.

"Isn't Talmere clever?" was his first greeting to Uli and Dorry.

They both laughed. "Yes, of course," they agreed; "but *à propos de quoi?*"

"Why, discovering you of course, or did you discover him? No, I'm sure he discovered you, he always does have the most stupendous luck. And I hear he has the most delightful evenings here, with music and poetry and things. Oh—

'Let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings!'

I *do* hope you won't shut me out, I'm quite a good boy."

His manner was so breezy, his face so good-humoured, his laugh so contagious, that it was impossible to treat him as anything else but an old friend.

"You appear to be just suited to Mr. Talmere," said Uli; "you both do just as you like, it seems, and no one ever scolds you."

"Oh, don't they!" groaned Telbesco. "You should just hear Talmere sometimes, when I've got on what he calls my bad fit. He scolded for a day and a half once."

"Yes, and what for?" asked Talmere, severely. "Just tell them."

"I don't mind!" said Telbesco, laughing. "Why you should have scolded I can't imagine. Lady Branton and Miss Richards shall be my judges. It was when we were at Julien's, a lot of fellows and I" ("You were the ringleader," put in Talmere) "were chairing the model round after class was over, she was—er—well, she had not yet gone back to her dressing-room; it was a very hot day, and we took her round the yard, and then we took her outside, and chaired her along the Boulevard, it was nice and cool for her."

"Go on," said Talmere, solemnly.

"Well, we—er—we put her down, you know, and went away."

"Yes," continued his friend, "and the poor thing was taken up by an *agent*, and had to explain, and he had to lend her his rain cloak, and put her in a cab." Uli and Dorry were laughing uncontrollably.

"I think it was very naughty," said Uli, when she could command her voice; "but, but—I'm afraid I should have laughed."

"Talmere laughed too, only he pretended he didn't," said Telbesco.

"He's always playing pranks, like a naughty schoolboy. He got into my studio once when I'd been called away for a few minutes, and dressed up my nude model in armour, and the casque wouldn't come off, and we had to get a locksmith in to file it, and my model was in violent hysterics and couldn't sit for the rest of the day."

Telbesco shrieked with laughter. "You *should* have seen her! Oh Lord! It was like a dog who's been drinking in a can and couldn't get his head out, wild shrieks coming through the tin, appeals to all the saints, floods of tears (the casque was rusty after), beatings of the breast, and all the rest of it—oh, you'd have roared!"

Suddenly he went to the piano and dashed into a wild march, broke off in the middle and sang a curious weird Russian song with a voice of the angel Israfel. The women were entranced.

"Oh, go on, go on!" they both cried when he had finished; but he got up.

"No, play fair," he said, laughing; "your turn now."

He roused them all up before he had been two days at Versailles, and he ended by falling wildly and romantically in love with Dorry. It was patent to every one; he hung about her with the adoring eyes of a dog. If she was kind to him he was as light-hearted as a child, if she frowned, his spirits went down to zero.

Talmere had finished his picture and he was giving himself a holiday, and the four took many excursions in the neighbourhood, and never were four people so seemingly suited to each other. A lot of nonsense is talked about "opposites agreeing," but when it comes to the crucial test of close companionship it does not stand the strain. It is those whose tastes are in common who agree best and whose intercourse is most satisfactory, least free from jars.

When they went further afield they took a meal with them and made merry over it; they sometimes went in Telbesco's motor to dear little country villages where they lunched at the inn, a merry party that the landlady smiled upon with protective good-nature. How thoroughly they enjoyed themselves! Uli's eyes lost the rather sad look they had held for so long, and she appeared better than she had for years. She felt like an irresponsible child waiting for what the gods will send; she lived in the moment, and each moment was full of innocent pleasure.

Each night she went to bed healthily tired, and

slept almost at once, instead of lying awake thinking, as she had done for a long while now. She did not attempt to analyze her feelings; she just was happy, and that was a rare enough sensation with her, for her to take it with thankfulness and ask no questions.

Two days before the men were to leave for Paris they were all four sitting in the early afternoon in one of the wild spots of the Grand Trianon grounds. These haunts are unknown to the ordinary tourist, and they were quite alone. Telbesco had been singing to the accompaniment of a curious little instrument, something like a mandoline, but with notes less harsh. He often brought this out with him at his companions' earnest request. He had a really glorious voice, and had a collection of weird little haunting songs, mostly Russian, which breathed of the great loneliness of the Steppes, or of the unsophisticated gaiety of the first men.

They were sitting on the grass by a little clump of trees and bushes. Overhead the sky was a serene blue flecked with tiny white cotton-woolly clouds. Uli called it a "woffly" sky; it was quite a word of her own, but it was adopted by the other three; the artists said it was the exact word to describe it. Uli had her hat off, and Dorry had plaited a crown of ivy leaves and placed it on her friend's head.

Presently a squirrel began to chatter overhead, and they were all silent, staring up into the trees. In a minute they saw his tiny furry body climbing up a trunk, then a flying leap, and he was gone. Another

appeared, tried to find his companion, chattered, clambered, swung a moment on a branch, the sun touching the red of his bushy tail; then he, too, leapt and disappeared.

"Aren't they angels?" said Uli. "How I do love them! Fancy brutes shooting them."

"Let's go to that further wood," suggested Telbesco; "there are heaps of squirrels there. Will you come?"

"Not I," declared Uli; "I'm far too lazy and comfy."

"I'll come if you like," said Dorry.

If he *liked!* He sprang to his feet and gave her a hand to help her up; he was happy, for was not his goddess gracious to-day?

They wandered off. Uli sat, leaning against a tree, watching them go.

"What a delightful boy it is!" she exclaimed.

Talmere was lying on his side, his hand supporting his head. He laughed.

"Yes, he is a boy, isn't he? Yet he's thirty-four, only two years younger than I am."

Uli had her hands laid flat along the cool green grass, and Talmere put his long brown fingers over one of her hands. A little tremor ran through her; she did not lower her eyes, but stared over the green grass, and watched the vanishing figures of the other two.

"Uli!" His voice had that curious hoarseness in it that always thrilled her in a man; her pupils dilated a little, but she did not speak.

"Uli," he repeated, "if—if you were any other

woman I would make love to you first and *make* you love me. But—but you might misunderstand."

She did not move her eyes from the distant view. "What do you mean?" She tried to steady her voice, but the tremor of her body seemed to creep into it. He held her hand tight.

"I mean that—oh, Uli, try and understand me, it's so difficult. I love you, my beautiful love! I should have loved to make you feel for me one-half what I feel for you before I asked you to marry me, but you see I was afraid. When I kissed your beautiful eyes that day I did not know who you were; I knew your name was Branton only. It was not till Miss Dorry referred to you as Lady Branton that I knew, and then I could not make love to you, sweet. I was afraid you might think—might think——"

He broke off his disjointed sentences and drew a deep breath; he was hurting her hand in his agitation, but she did not feel it.

"Uli," he went on almost harshly, "I thought you might think that I thought I had a right to play with you—men are such brutes. My dear, my dear, I want you so, I love you so. Will you marry me?"

Her nostrils quivered; she tried to speak and failed. Then she wetted her lips.

"That has made me love—I mean"—she broke off and began again—"I understand. I often wondered—I think you—oh, I *can't* say what I mean."

He sat up abruptly, and shook her arm. "Uli, will you marry me?" His breath was coming with great,

uneven gasps, and she could hear his heart beating, even from there.

"Oh, I don't know, I don't know. I wish you'd understand; I can't explain. I want to be sure I love *really* before I marry any one. I can love so tremendously, I'm sure of that; but I've had no chance. I was married so young, and after that I wouldn't try, of course. I want to love, oh, *how* much I want to love!"

She clasped her hands tight. Great tears were welling up into her eyes. Then she turned them to him, and saw his passionate, waiting face.

"I don't know," she said brokenly. "You must give me time. I don't know whether this is the real thing, or only just——"

But the man could stand no more. He caught her into his arms, bruising her body against him; he kissed her quivering mouth with a passion only intensified by waiting. She let herself go. Was not this the first time? Oh, the divine luxury of *feeling!* So this was what she had waited for so long. Her body throbbed from head to foot. Kisses! Kisses! Should she ever tire of them? Her heart had been starved, he gave it food and drink, and with a hungry eagerness she eat of love's fruit, and palpitated with the most exquisite abandonment of loving.

Minutes passed without a word from either of them, then he pressed her face back against his shoulder and looked at her.

"You're my woman. I want you—oh, dear God, I

want you. Everything I love, everything I have dreamed of." He spoke so brokenly, shaken by feeling as he was, that she could hardly hear him. He went on more clearly. "You shall have time, my sweet; you shall know that this is the real thing before you promise. But I will *make* you know. You shall be my own. I tell you that you and I are made as one. Uli, say you love me."

She opened her shut eyes; they were all pupil now. "You have given me the happiest moments my life has ever known. I love you, yes—but I must wait. I must know for certain; I will tell you when I know. I want to love you more than all imagination, and I think you may make me. But you must not hurry me. We must be *sure*."

He bent and kissed her eyes. "Yes, we *must* be sure!" he repeated.

Chapter XII

MISS RICHARDS was trying on a new blouse in front of the glass in Uli's room. Uli was sitting by the open window, looking out at the children at play in the Tuileries gardens. They were in a small hotel in the Rue de Rivoli, and although it was the twenty-fifth of September, the weather was superb; the trees showed hardly a sign of fading leaf, and the air was soft and balmy. Uli loved Paris, as every one must who knows her well. She felt a *joie de vivre* that she rarely felt in England, and now especially she was happier than she had ever been. She and Dorry had decided to stay three weeks instead of one before they started off on their travels. Uli could not make up her mind to tear herself away from her present happiness, although she knew she must go away from Talmere before she could judge whether what she felt was true love or a mere matter of the senses.

Who was it said "Men desire women, but women desire men's desire"?

She gave a little sigh and drummed on the arm of her chair with her long fingers.

Dorry turned round from the glass. "Look here, Uli," she said gravely, "I've not bothered you before, but it's no good being secretive. *Are* you going to marry him?"

Uli started. "I don't know," she answered, keeping her eyes fixed on a small child playing with a dog.

"*You don't know!*" repeated Dorry, severely. "What do you mean? The man is madly in love with you. Johnnie"—she blushed faintly—"says he is not given to falling in love, and it's easy to see he can think of nothing but you. You surely ought to know whether you care for him or not."

"I *do* care for him; but——"

"'But!'"—Dorry's voice was scornful. "Just as if there can be a 'but' when one cares!"

"That's just it!" said Uli, plaintively. "It's because there's a 'but' in my mind that I can't be sure whether it's the real sterling feeling I *want* it to be. I've told him so."

"Oh!" said Dorry, simply.

"Yes, he knows," continued Uli; "he asked me to marry him, and I said—I said I'd tell him later on, when we come back."

"That's not fair," announced Dorry, impatiently. "You can't keep the poor man dangling in uncertainty for months; it's not fair."

"Why?" asked Uli, rather hotly. "Surely, if he's willing, it's all right. It's far better to go away and be sure, than to accept him now, and ruin his whole life if I find I've made a mistake."

Dorry sniffed. "My dear Uli, you're cracked! You say you care for the man; what more do you want? I'm sure he's nice enough for anybody. What *do* you mean by 'sure'? You say you care for him," she repeated.

"Oh, Dorry, don't be so stupid! You must know what I mean. He is the first man who has, who has—I mean——" She grew confused.

"I suppose you're trying to say that he's the first man whom you've let make love to you," suggested Dorry, prosaically.

Uli turned her face more to the window. "Yes," she said meekly; "you see, it's a new sensation, and stirs me fearfully; and how am I to know whether I might not feel that with any one? Any one decent, I mean. It may not be real love at all; it may be simply, simply—er——"

"Passion?" proposed Dorry. "Really, Uli, you're singularly bashful to-day; why not say what you mean? I'm not an ogre."

"Yes, I do mean that," said Uli, quickly. "I'm carried off my feet, and I want to have time to think. I want to see other people. I want to know that what I feel is unique for Ivor. I can't tell yet. I'm not a child of seventeen, who is swept away by her first kiss, the first clasp of strong arms, and thinks it is the one and only tremendous love, just because she has a thrill in her shoulder-blades and a strong inclination to sneeze."

Dorry giggled. "Sneeze?" she inquired. "Why sneeze?"

Uli blushed a little. "Is that uncommon?" she asked. "I always want to sneeze; in the old days, whenever I wrote or read a strong love passage I constantly used to sneeze—something funny always happens

at the back of my nose on those occasions, and the tears come, or I sneeze. *Voila!*"

"It sounds very unromantic," said Dorry, still smiling broadly. "But anyway, Uli, I don't think it's fair. Suppose you find it is only a matter of—er—of sneezing, how about Talmere?"

"Oh, he understands. He agrees with me that one must be sure. Dorry," she continued rather pitifully, "don't fail me now, dear; I want your understanding so badly."

Dorry was melted immediately, and flung herself on her knees by Uli's chair, and clasped the two soft hands lying on the table.

"I'm a beast," she said energetically; "you're a darling, and you're quite right not to marry him unless you are sure. I was only thinking of him instead of you. We won't say any more about it. But he's a real good sort, one of God's own, and I hope you will find that it is 'the real thing.' Come, Uli, we must dress. Shall I go in this blouse? Don't you think it wrinkles a weeny bit in the back?" and Dorry twisted her neck scientifically out of joint in an effort to see her own back.

They were going for a motor drive with Talmere and Telbesco, and in ten minutes the men drove up to the door for them.

It was Telbesco's car, the same he had brought down to Versailles, and they drove out nearly every day in it, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. To-day they went down to St. Cloud, and had lunch there.

Afterwards, on the terrace, they all four admired the unrivalled view of Paris, and talked gaily for half an hour.

"I say," said Telbesco, suddenly, "have you two ever been to Fontainebleau?"

"Yes, I've been once, two or three years ago," said Uli; "but Dorry has never been, have you, Dorry?"

"No; I'd just love to go. Could we go one day in the car?"

"Well, we were talking it over to-day," answered Telbesco. "You see it's rather a rush to do it in one day; there's such a lot to see. We were thinking that we might stay a night or two. Not at Fontainebleau itself, but some little place near. We know a gem of a village, if you wouldn't mind roughing it at an inn; it calls itself an hotel of course. It's quite clean, and the beds are comfortable, naturally, but they haven't a tub in the place, but plenty of hot water, and the food is excellent. I say, do consent, Lady Branton. It would be so awfully jolly, and the weather is superb." He looked at Uli anxiously.

"Oh, do, Uli," exclaimed Dorry. "It *would* be fun."

Uli hesitated. "Do you think it would be proper?" she asked, smilingly. "What would Mrs. Grundy say?"

"Da——, I beg your pardon, bother Mrs. Grundy," said Telbesco. "What on earth does it matter? A hundred to one no one will know, and even if they did, what can they say? We might any day find ourselves staying at the same hotel anywhere, and they could say nothing then. What difference does it make?"

"Oh, Uli!" said Dorry, reproachfully, "you said you were going to do as you liked, and now the first little tiny unconventional thing that's suggested you talk about Mrs. Grundy!"

Uli shrugged her shoulders, and shook her head back, as though she threw off a weight.

"Of course," she said gaily, "the whole thing's nonsense. Why shouldn't we go? Do *you* want us to?" she asked, looking softly at Talmere.

He nodded, with his eyes on hers. "Yes, darling," he whispered, quite close to her ear.

"Very well, we'll go, children. Your grandmother consents. When shall we go?"

Telbesco gave a wild war whoop, that startled two dogs and the old man with the telescope, who was waiting patiently for customers; he also danced a few steps of a mad dance, sprang on the stone balustrade at the risk of his neck, and settled at last on to it straddle-legged.

"Now, Talmere," he laughed, "you must do the business, as usual. I'm too young."

"Too inconsequent, you mean," said the lady of his heart. "Johnnie, do be quiet for one minute, and let us arrange things."

He subsided, pretending to look lugubrious, and Talmere suggested they should go the next day. He would telegraph for rooms to the hotel at Thomery, and they would start about ten the next day, if fine, lunch *en route*, and take it easy.

"You won't take Henriette, I suppose?" he asked.

No. Uli would certainly not take Henriette, and, moreover, they would bring only one small, flat box between them, which would easily go in the motor, and they would wear blouses and skirts, and generally do as they liked.

It was all talked over and arranged; and they drove back to Paris, all four chattering like magpies.

The next morning, to their joy, it was beautifully fine, with a temperature extraordinarily high for the time of year, and they all started off as gaily as children on a school treat. Their luggage took up a good deal of room, but it was a large car, and they were not unduly crushed. The road was not very pretty most of the way, but splendid for motoring, and they told stories, laughed, and teased each other to their hearts' content. Oh, the glorious clear air. It was good to rush through it, and breathe it deep down into the lungs. They had lunch at Melun, and walked about afterwards, admiring this town, favoured by artists, till they were tired. Then they went on, through the exquisite forest road to Thomery, the village of vines; the grapes were in their full glory, and picturesque groups of people were picking the luscious bunches, and laying them in baskets. The vines were everywhere; over the houses, in little gardens, on the palings, and even on the walls at the sides of the roads. People do not steal in Thomery.

The women were charmed as they descended the steep road into the village. Dorry clapped her hands.

"Oh, this is heavenly!" she cried. "One can do just what one likes here."

They swept past the tiny church, by the side of which was located a gipsy van, and pulled up in front of the inn. Little tables were in front of the door, and at the side was a verandah, with more tables, and a sort of bower—the dining-room of the hotel. People do not go to Thomery in winter, and, if it rains, the verandah is enough shelter.

Uli's eyes sparkled. "This is different to the Carlton, isn't it?" she said laughingly, as she descended from the car.

The landlord and his wife and the waiter came out to welcome them. The men were old friends, and they shook hands with them, and asked after their health. They were delighted to see them.

On Talmere's advice, Uli and Dorry were to share one room, as it was the "best" room, and really comfortable in its simple way. It was quite large, in the front of the house, with two comfortable beds in it and four windows.

"It's over the bar, you know," said Talmere, as he put down their dressing-cases, "and it is fearfully noisy in the mornings; but, luckily, they're early people down here, and, except on Saturdays and Sundays, they don't have much noise at nights, and we shan't be here then."

"I think it's delightful," said Uli. "I suppose there's no bell. No!—will you yell for some hot water as you go to your room? We'll be ready to explore in ten minutes."

Then, as the man closed the door, she seized Dorry round the waist and waltzed her up the room.

"Huroo!" she cried, "we're going to thoroughly enjoy ourselves. I haven't felt so larky for years, little dormouse!"

The servant, beaming with good-nature, brought the hot water, and entered into a conversation with Uli about the grapes. She thought madame had come for the grape cure, and entered into particulars of all its virtues. Henceforward Uli was known as "*L'Anglaise qui parle français.*"

They took their picnic basket with them when they went out, and made themselves tea on the banks of the river under the poplars.

They ran races, picked lovely red leaves and put them in their hats, and, as Dorry expressed it, they got "youngerer and youngerer" every moment.

Then they walked along till they got into the vineyards, and watched the grape-gatherers at work for an hour before they went back with tremendous appetites for dinner.

How often afterwards did Uli think of those three days at Thomery. The weather was perfect summer weather; there was no rain, and even the nights were warm, with a glorious moon. Her life was completely happy; her worries seemed like a horrible nightmare long past. She basked in love with the passionate delight of a person who has been starving and at last is given food.

One hot afternoon she was sitting in the forest—

surely one of the most beautiful in the world—with Talmere. The glorious trees arose round them in their straight dignity and their summer freshness, the birds sang gaily, and all was perfect peace. Dorry and Telbesco had wandered off, as they nearly always did, and Uli was quite alone with her lover.

"Love is beautiful anywhere," said Talmere, gently, as he stroked her hair; "but surely out in the 'forest primeval' it takes an added beauty—it seems more perfect, more real."

Uli caught his hand and kissed it. "Yes," she answered dreamily, "there is only you and me in the whole world. The primitive man making love to the primitive woman." Her head was resting on his knee and she looked up at him contentedly. "And the primitive woman is very happy," she added softly.

He bent and kissed her mouth. "Oh, Uli," he breathed passionately, "you *must* be sure now, my sweet? Can't you promise?"

Uli sighed. "I can't imagine anything else more perfect," she said gently. "But, Ivor, be patient with me. I have told you all my life, and all my thoughts, and you know what I feel about it. It is better for us both that I should be quite, quite certain. I do not think for one moment that any other man will have power to move me like this; but suppose, just suppose for an instant that some one did. What should we feel then? I should have to tell you, and then it would be worse. Now I have promised nothing, and you cannot say I have not been fair. If anything ever does—if any

one ever does make me feel like this or more—I can't think of more, somehow—it will not be my fault; whereas, if I promised you now, I *should* blame myself if anything happened. Oh, dear love, don't look like that." She raised herself in his arms and rubbed her soft cheek against his. "I love you, I love you; but it is the first time, and I must be sure for your sake and mine."

He strained her tightly against him. "I don't think I could live my life without you, Uli," he said huskily. "I don't think even now you realize what you are to me. How is it that *I* am sure? I *know* it is the one great love with me. Why can't you be sure?"

Uli's mouth passed softly backwards and forwards over his hair, it had a little wave in it that always pleased her.

"Dearest," she whispered, "you are ten years older than I am, and you have experimented before. Oh, hush! I don't mean it nastily; but you have told me, you see. You have made love to women—a few, and you know now that this is different. I, alas! have nothing to judge by and compare with. George did not count, I was so young, and I have forgotten it. My dear, don't you see—when you were in love with that French woman, for instance (the one I've labelled 'Hélène' in my mind), you thought at the time it was the genuine thing;" he moved restlessly. "Oh, I know," she continued, "you see now that it was only passion, but at the time, at the time, Ivor! I want to know too. I want to be able to say to myself, 'No

other man has power to move me like this man, and I will be his. I can be his with certainty that it is the one and only thing for me.'"

He suddenly seized her and held her head back and looked into her eyes.

"Uli!" he exclaimed, with his voice shaking, "you don't want, you can't mean to let other men make love to you? You don't mean to experimentalize?"

"I don't know," she answered honestly. "I don't mean to—to—I——"

He almost shook her. "My God!" he said fiercely. "*What* do you mean to do?"

"I don't know," she repeated, "I—oh, don't be cross to me, Ivor, you frighten me. No, no, let me go. Ivor, *do* understand. I am not deliberately going to—going to make men fall in love with me. But I must see other men. I shall know at once. Look at Monsieur Landreau, for instance; I know he would have proposed to me, but I knew at once he was impossible."

Talmere laughed grimly. "That little ass!" he said contemptuously. "No, but you will find many fascinating men ready to fall at your feet, and what then?"

"I shall know, I think—I hope—oh, Ivor, I *must* do what I think best. I love you, dear; is that nothing?"

He was shaking from head to foot, and he spoke quickly between his teeth.

"And one day, I suppose, you will write to me, 'Herr Blackmoustache has made love to me, and I like him best. He kisses better than you.—*Au'voir*'!"

Uli put her hand over his mouth.

"Hush, Ivor," she whispered; "don't say things like that. Besides, no one could kiss better than you;" and she put her warm lips to his.

"Anyway, I have you now!" he crushed her till he hurt her; "and I love you, and I love you, and I could kill you!"

Chapter XIII

MR. DORMAN, the trainer, stood with arms akimbo, watching the stream of horses return from their gallop. The dew was still on the cobwebs; not that there were any cobwebs about the yard or stables,—Dorman's eyes were too sharp for that.

Dorman was very red and very fat. A once famous jockey, when he left off riding it seemed as if it were a positive relief to him to let his flesh have its own way.

He stood now rotund and keen, a crop in his hand, and noted with eagle eyes each horse as it passed him.

"Here, you there, Simpson!" he shouted, pointing with his crop at a small aspiring jockey mounted on a sleek two-year old, "what did you alter that girth for?"

Simpson checked the colt and trembled.

"Please sir, I thought it was too loose," he answered in a small voice.

"Damn you, sir, don't think!" shouted Dorman. "I don't pay you to think, I pay you to obey; *I* do the thinking."

Simpson was white with terror, and twisted his fingers nervously.

"I suppose the colt's been jumping round? Quite so!" Dorman continued sarcastically. "Perhaps now you'll let me do the thinking. I knew his sire, you see, *you* didn't. I wonder you weren't chucked, you blithering young fool. You don't touch my girths again, or I'll give you what for. If I choose to put his saddle on his head or his tail, you're to ride there; so understand."

The discomfited Simpson retired, and Dorman wiped his face with his handkerchief, then a hand came down on his shoulder.

"Well done, Dorman!" said Brett, smiling broadly.

Dorman turned round and pulled off his cap.

"Well, sir, one has to be a bit stiff with 'em when they first come," he said apologetically. Then he looked at the distant trees and coughed.

"How's 'Love in a mist,' Dorman?"

Dorman drew himself upright. "She's never been better in her life, Mr. Brett; there ain't a muscle or a hair I'd have altered. She's just be—utiful."

"Think we have a chance, then?"

"Think?" scoffed Dorman. "I'd just like to see the horse that can beat her at the weights. Why, she's just chucked in, Mr. Brett, just chucked in."

Brett smiled contentedly. When Dorman was optimistic—which was very seldom—he knew that he should have a good fight for his money. He turned towards the left wing of the stables.

"Come on, Dorman, we'll have a look at her. The youngsters are all in now. By the way, that Breadknife colt looks pretty promising."

"He is that, sir," said Dorman, proudly. "He's got the finest quarters of any two-year-old we've got. He's only got one fault, and I don't blame him neither; he just won't look at this 'ere starting-gate yet. The moment he sees the webbing he goes in a fair muck sweat all over. I'm going to put some webbing in his box, just to get him used to it, the poor brute."

If there was one thing that made Dorman really angry it was this "new-fangled notion," as he still called it—the starting-gate.

"Here she is, sir;" and he opened the door of a commodious loose box. A bright chestnut mare whinneyed softly and came towards him. She justified all that he had said about her; she was in perfect condition, lean, full of muscle and fire, with her beautiful coat shining like a newly opened chestnut.

"Yes, she has got on wonderfully this week, Dorman," said Brett, smoothing the glossy neck gently.

"She's just the spit of her sire, Mr. Brett."

"Yes," said Brett, looking her over. "A little stronger in the shoulders, perhaps."

The two men talked horse talk for half an hour, then Brett went back to the house for breakfast. It was the end of September, and though the days were somewhat misty in the early mornings, the sun usually shone brightly later on, and the temperature was quite high for the time of year.

After breakfast Brett mounted his horse and started off towards the downs for a brisk gallop. When he came to the cross roads at Mickleworth Corner he saw another

rider in front of him; he quickened to a canter and ranged up alongside a smart roan, with raised cap and a cheery "Good morning."

Lady Prudence Sackton looked very well on horseback, and his eye ran approvingly over the straight back and well-poised figure. She was eminently a tailor-made woman, as so many Englishwomen are. She never looked as nice in any Parisian hat as she did in her bowler, and no amount of fluffy lace could suit her as well as her simply collared white shirt and covert coat. She was thoroughly aware of this, and met Brett as often as she could out riding in the mornings. They had had many rides together the last two months, and Prue's hopes had gone up with a bound, especially as her brother Andover had told her that Brett and Uli were not going to marry.

She had never once mentioned the subject of the divorce to Brett, for which he was truly thankful.

This morning they had a delightful gallop on the downs, and drew up exhilarated and glowing on the edge of "the cut," as it was called, to admire the lovely view over four counties.

"How I love a good gallop!" sighed Prudence, contentedly. "I can never understand how you can leave all this ever and coop yourself up in London."

Brett laughed. "How about yourself, Lady Prue?" he asked teasingly. "You go to London every season, and you don't even ride, except in the Row."

"Oh, well, one has to," said Prudence, shrugging her shoulders in a very English way. "But a man can do

as he likes; you could stay here all the summer if you liked."

"Yes, but I don't like. You see, other things interest me so much. I could hear no music down here, for instance."

Lady Prudence smiled in a superior way. "Oh yes, music. Well, you could go up for a week, or a night or two now and then, and do some operas." She was one of those persons who always talk of "doing" an opera or a concert. "Are you writing anything now?" she went on, looking at him inquiringly.

Waddy looked grave. "No," he answered; "I seem rather stuck up just now. I'd got nearly halfway through a book with Lady Branton; but, but—she's gone abroad."

It was the first time he had mentioned Lady Branton in these last two months, and Lady Prudence flushed. Then she made a great tactical error.

"Oh yes, she's in Paris," she announced in a dry voice. "Mother heard from the Blighs yesterday. They say she is leading an extraordinary life; they saw her coming out of an hotel in Fontainebleau with a man. They were just motoring past at the time. She did not recognize them. She was hanging on his arm. They say he's some artist or other. Such a pity, isn't it?"

Waddy had got an angry red. "Yes," he said, through his shut teeth, "it is a pity."

"I'm so glad you agree with me," said Prue, cheerfully. "I think it's such a pity when women who once were ladies do that sort of thing."

"You mistake me, Lady Prudence," answered Waddy,

stiffly, "as I'm sorry to say I mistook you. I thought you intended to convey that you thought it a pity that people lowered themselves by gossiping so."

Prudence glanced at his face, it was very stern, and she perceived her mistake.

"Oh!" she exclaimed briskly, walking her horse carefully along a stony patch, "that's of course. But people will talk, you know; one never can prevent them."

Brett turned towards her and spoke sternly. "I think one of the greatest sins in this world is gossip. More mischief is done, more hearts are broken, by gossip than by anything else. Why not be merciful to one's fellow man or woman? One may need mercy one's self one day. Why not refuse to believe everything bad one hears? Don't you think, Lady Prue, that the world is quite sad enough without trying in every way one knows to make it sadder?"

Lady Prudence looked uncomfortable; but she smiled easily, as a long teaching in the world's school had taught her to do.

"That quite reminds me of a speech in 'Behind the Blind'; that was a lovely scene of yours, that scene between Sarah and the old man."

"It was not mine," said Brett, quickly. "That chapter was Lady Branton's entirely."

"Indeed?" Prue felt quite annoyed. She had been so sure it was his, so sure too that Lady Branton had had nothing to do with the book. "So she really *did* write some of it?" she added without thinking.

"What do you mean?" asked Waddy, abruptly.

"Of course she wrote some of it, more than half, in fact. Did you forget that it was a joint book?"

Prudence grew really confused now, and almost stuttered in her embarrassment.

"No, I—I—yes, I know her name was in it; but I thought—I mean, I was not sure——"

"Look here, Lady Prue," he interrupted, "you mean to say you thought that Lady Branton did not write with me! Why do you suppose I—but I won't cross-examine you. I can see plainly what you think, and I suppose you are perfectly justified in your thoughts—one must not expect charity nowadays."

Lady Prudence was thoroughly frightened now, and lied bravely. She held out her hand to him, leaning over from her horse.

"Please forgive me," she said frankly. "I only did it out of a spirit of perversity. I don't believe what they said; I never did."

Brett was too straight a man himself to always expect guile in another, and though he had an uneasy feeling deep down in his heart that he was being "done," he took the well-gloved hand as frankly as apparently it was offered. And as they urged their horses to a brisk trot she chattered brightly to him about many trivial things, trying hard to smooth away any roughness that her tactlessness might have left in the placidity of their intercourse.

As they were passing along a lane at the back of the Sackton woods, Brett halted his horse and listened; then he dismounted quickly.

"Do you mind holding him for a minute?" he said, and passed her the reins without waiting for an answer. He ran along the lane till he came to a gate between the hedges; he vaulted this, and ran back in the field till he came level with Lady Prudence and the horses; he stooped and peered amongst the branches and leaves in the ditch. "Ah! I thought so," he exclaimed; and down he went on his knees.

"What *are* you doing?" cried Prue, trying to see through the thick hedge. But he did not answer.

His teeth were set hard, and he was trying to hold a terrified hare, and at the same time release its hind foot from a gin. He got the trap open at last, and held the struggling animal between his knees and examined its leg tenderly. "Only scratched and torn a bit, not broken, thank goodness," he muttered; then he wetted his handkerchief in the water at the bottom of the ditch and bathed the wound. The hare was quite still now, nearly dead with terror.

"Poor little brute!" Brett murmured softly. "There, run away, you'll soon be quite well."

"Who are you talking to?" asked Prudence, impatiently. "I think you might answer."

"All right," answered Brett; "I'm coming back." He picked up the gin, uprooted the peg it was held by, and walked off with it. He turned his head and saw the hare move its ears and quiver, then in a second it was off. He smiled at the vanishing brown streak, then he frowned as he got over the gate. He joined his companion with the gin in his hand.

"I was releasing a wretched hare from this," he said. "Don't these fields belong to your father?"

"Yes," said Prue. "Why did you bother? The keeper would have been round soon."

Brett mounted his horse; he did not try to explain. He held the gin in front of him.

"I'll come up to the house with you, if I may. I want to see your father. He promised me faithfully he would suppress all gins on his land and use snares instead. This must be unknown to him."

"Why, what difference does it make?" asked Prue, looking puzzled.

"Only the difference between slow-drawn-out torture and sudden death," answered Brett, grimly.

Prue laughed. "Oh, I forgot you were a faddist."

"No, I'm not a faddist," said Brett, quickly. "I see no harm in killing things; but I hate unnecessary cruelty, and I think you'd find this rather painful if it closed on your foot and you couldn't get away, and you had to stay with broken bone and torn flesh till a man came round at his leisure to knock you on the head."

"Perhaps I should," acknowledged Prue. "I never thought about it. Well, come in and see the Dad; he'll do what he can if he promised. I must say Dad never breaks a promise."

She was only too glad of an excuse to take him home with her; it probably meant his staying to lunch, and then she could take him to see her fernery, and then there was always a chance he might—and she went off into daydreams.

She forgot Lady Branton; but Brett did not. What she had said remained in his mind, and he frowned now and then as he thought of it. So they were gossiping about her, the spotless! the brutes—well, he must write to her, not tell her, of course, what he had heard, but just a chatty friendly letter. When was she coming home? he wondered. It seemed so long since he had seen her. How he missed her! the last two months had crawled. When she saw him again, would she be changed?

He was awakened from his reverie by the lodge gates being opened. Ah, well!

> "'There may be heaven, there must be hell.
> Meanwhile there is our earth here—well!'"

he muttered to himself as he passed through the gates by the side of Prudence.

Chapter XIV

WADDINGTON BRETT had not the faintest idea that Lady Prudence Sackton wished to marry him, and would have been very surprised if any one had told him that such was the case. She was not a girl that appealed to him at all, except in her out-of-door capacity. He found her pleasant enough to ride with and talk to, but they had no other ideas or tastes in common, and the notion of marrying a woman to whom he could not talk of his most cherished ideals never entered his head. He always told himself that he was not a marrying man, not that he was puritanical by any means, but he did not fall in love easily, and had never yet in his life taken any affair of the heart *au grand sérieux*. That he was quite capable of doing so was easy to see by the cut of his deep-set eyes and the lines of his mouth, but hitherto his loves had been very light, and had been taken as lightly by the woman. He had never made love where it could do harm, a professional flirt interested him for the moment as a study more than anything else; he would go to visit her in the same mood in which he would go to a new opera by an unknown composer. "This may be very interesting," his unconscious thoughts might run, "and it may be very dull; anyway, it's something new, and may entertain me for the moment." It sometimes was dull and it sometimes was entertaining,

but never had it been of such stupendous interest that it had impressed his innermost nature. When he had first met Uli a little glow had touched his heart, but he was not a flirt, and, unless a woman began, he never entered into that *badinage* that is the beginning of so much. Uli had not started on this footing, and they had become firm friends without a suspicion of anything else. It had never once struck him that any one might put a wrong construction on their intercourse, and when Sir George Branton's solicitors had served the citation he had been positively stunned with the magnitude of the catastrophe. He had never for an instant thought that the verdict could be anything else but exoneration for Uli and himself, and if he had had a nature one whit less strong and self-reliant, he would have probably been knocked under by the immense injustice.

As it was, his chief sorrow was for Uli; his heart ached for her, and it was not too much to say that he would willingly have gone away from the world and all he cared for, if, by so doing, he could have lifted the burden of shame from her innocent shoulders.

He had met Lady Elizabeth West in the first week in August, and what she had told him had made him rage against his impotency.

"Waddy, my dear," she had said, laying her hand impressively on his arm, "you must *make* Uli marry you. Oh, I am sure you have asked her, you need not tell me that; but you must *make* her consent, otherwise she will go to the bad. You are her friend, and understand her as well, better, perhaps, than I do; you know

her curious nature, and you know there's everything to fear. Hitherto she has been spotless, but it has only been owing to pride. Now that that pride has been humiliated, and her spotlessness sneered at and disbelieved in publicly, what is left her? Waddy, you must make her love you. She is innately good and true, and will be absolutely faithful to her husband, I know that. My dear boy, do what you can."

There were tears of deep feeling in the faded blue eyes, and Waddy had choked over the agony of it. What could he do? He had been to see Uli again, but she would not see him alone. He had written to her, imploring her to marry him, but she had answered in a characteristically charming letter, forbidding him to ever mention the subject again. He was helpless, he could only watch from a distance and rave in his mind at the "swan's obtaining the crow's rebuff."

After Prudence's piece of scandal, he had written Uli a long, friendly letter, imploring her to return and pick up the pieces of their friendship and go on with the book. More than three weeks had passed, and he had had no answer. It was November now, and he was installed in his rooms in town. "Love in a mist" had won her race, and he had had several other minor successes, but, as he came into the breakfast-room on a dull November morning, he was feeling very low-spirited; he had heard another piece of gossip about Uli the night before, and he was feeling his helplessness more than ever.

On his plate was a pile of correspondence. He

poured out his tea and helped himself to grilled kidneys, and began his breakfast; then he looked over his letters. But in one moment his indifference had gone. There was a large, square, foreign envelope, with the Budapest postmark on it, directed in the well-known handwriting. He tore it open eagerly; it was a very long letter, many sheets of thin paper written small. He forgot his breakfast, and pushed the things away from him to make room for his elbows. He began with a smile on his face; it was so good to hear from her again.

"Grand Hotel Hungaria, Budapest,
"November 8.

"Your letter reached me in Paris three weeks ago, *mon ami*, and I deserve all the nasty things you're saying of me to yourself. The truth is I can't write letters in Paris. I didn't write one! Here somehow it is different, and Dorry and I are both making up for lost time, and writing furiously at this moment.

"We arrived here on the 6th. We stayed three days at the Grand in Vienna *en route*, and raced about like true trippers, seeing all we could in the time. I *did* enjoy the pictures! Here we installed ourselves in two delightful communicating rooms, heated by huge tile stoves, overlooking the river (*the Danube!* think of it!), and exactly opposite is the fort and the Király Palota. Really never have I seen a town more perfectly situated. The sun sank behind the hills opposite (old Buda) last night like a huge ball of flame, and the sky was a deep glorious violet, not blue at all.

"My mother's cousin and her husband called yesterday morning, and they were charming to me. They speak French, luckily; as you know, I hate speaking German. Mrs. Tihanyi is a very ugly woman; it is difficult to think of her as my mother's cousin. But she is kindness personified, and as for hospitality, she has adopted us, and will hardly allow us to come to the hotel at all. They have some cousins of his (not mine) staying there, so they have no room for us; but as for us feeding here, she won't hear of it. Herr Tihanyi is a little, round, bald man, *very* foreign looking, but clever, and a charming talker. We, of course, lunched and dined there yesterday (they call it dinner and supper here), and they got some more people in for dinner—or supper—to meet us. Such a pretty thing, too, they did; my chair was different from the others, and was twined all over with smilax, with the branches going on to the table, so I was in a sort of fairy chair, and in front of me my plate was wreathed round with lilies of the valley and roses. I felt like a queen. Fancy saying we're a hospitable race! Ye gods! compared to these people we don't know the meaning of the word. Every one we met called to-day, and we've received six invitations to lunches and dinners. The names of the people are awful, I can't remember one, and as for spelling them! One man we are to meet to-night they say is very interesting, he's very rich and a member of Parliament. His name begins with a K and ends with a sneeze, that's all I can remember! My joy was somewhat damped last night by one of my own

countrywomen who was there. Thank goodness, she goes away to-day. She came with an introduction to them from some business friends. How she ever knew even their business friends I can't imagine. Her name is Mrs. Blake-Mornington (hyphen very much *en evidence*, please!), and she's vulgar to the last degree. She gets up from her chair to shake hands with every man; she always speaks to every one of her husband as 'Mr. Blake-Mornington,' and wears a miniature of him. He looks just the sort of man who *would* wear his name parted in the middle! They evidently realize that she is not 'quite quite,' but they are so good and kind that they entertained her just as if she were any other stranger in a strange land.

"They make no reference to my matrimonial affairs. I, of course, wrote and told them, in case they did not wish to receive me. But as far as I can make out they do not realize it in the least. They think we are an eccentric nation as far as marriage is concerned, and apparently think our divorce laws are the same as the American, and that we just pop in and out of the ceremony with complete ease. I only know this from her letter to Paris, as she says nothing, the only thing she said was to Dorry, and that was vague to the last degree—*C'est ennuyeux que le mari de ma cousine ait été tellement difficile.* So she evidently thinks it was a case of incompatibility of temper!

"She says I am very like my mother, which pleases me greatly, as I can remember her distinctly, and she

was very beautiful, far more beautiful than I ever expect to be.

"The food here is perfect. They seem to realize, like the French, that the natural taste of everything is nasty, and disguise it as much as possible. If the Almighty had made water nicer there would be fewer drunkards, don't you think?

"Every one kisses one's hand here, from the hall porter and servants to the man one meets at dinners—such a charming habit.

"These dear people have taken a box for the Fövárosi Orfeum for to-night, and please don't think I've written that word all by myself! I found it in a newspaper just now! Why didn't my mother teach me Hungarian? One can never learn it when one is grown up. It appears your noun alters its construction according to its gender, quantity, and quality, not the prefix or the affix, mind you, but the word itself has things stuck into the middle of it. The whole thing makes one's brain whirl.

"Dorry chatters away in her mad French, and enjoys herself hugely: she *is* a dear. Henriette is quite well, rather *désolée* at leaving France, but filled with astonishment that any other nation can cook so well.

"We stayed in Paris longer than we intended (you see I am working backwards), as the weather was so lovely. We were at Versailles till September 21, in a lamb of a villa. Then we went to Paris, and went various excursions all about in a motor. We went down to Fontainebleau for three days, and stayed at a

delightful place—Thomery, all amongst the vines, and did what we liked, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. It was rather unconventional, as there were two men with us; but I don't care. I intend to enjoy myself now. One man is fearfully in love with Dorry. He's half Roumanian, and very jolly. She's really very *éprise* with him, but is rather afraid her people may be upset at her marrying a 'plain mister!' She's very amusing on the subject. 'If he were only a count, even a Papal count!' she sighs. She doesn't care a bit herself, but says 'the honour of the American nation demands that every American woman who marries a foreigner should choose a title!' However, I think she will end by smirching the 'honour of the American nation.'

"As for me, my friend, I think I am going to marry too. You deserve my confidence, and you have always had it. I am very happy, and that I know will please you. I am waiting to give a decided answer till I return to Paris, as I want to be sure I know my own mind.

"You will like him, Waddy, he is all that is delightful, and oh! I look forward to my life for the first time. I feel well, and so young. Don't worry, Waddy, any more over the past; I have forgotten it. You must too.

"Write again soon, and I won't keep you so long waiting for an answer as this time.

"*Nos salutations, Monsieur,*

"*Toujours à vous,*

"ULI BRANTON."

Brett dropped the rustling sheets on the table and pushed them from him. He knocked over the milk-jug, but did not notice it, and the white liquid spread itself slowly over the table and dropped on to the floor. He stared out of the window at the bleak outlook and saw nothing. Then he suddenly crushed the flimsy sheets of paper in his hands.

"Going to marry!" he said dully. "Oh, Uli, Uli, what a fool I've been! I never knew, O God, I never knew. Oh for all the past again!" That heartrending cry of the man who had missed things, "Oh for the past again! Uli! Uli! Uli!"

And he dropped his face in the letter and remained so, thinking, thinking; and all the time Fate was smiling with her sardonic smile at another life she had wrecked.

Chapter XV

IT was the twelfth of November, and Uli and Dorry were sitting by the double windows in the former's room, looking out at the superb view. The wide, swiftly flowing Danube, with lumps of ice already on its surface, quickly hurrying down to the sea, and on the other side the magnificent pile of the Király Palota, and the old fortress.

"How lovely it is!" sighed Uli. "I shall never get tired of looking at it."

Just then a servant entered the room with a card, and presented it to Uli. She glanced at it.

"It's the Szekelys," she said to Dorry; "they've written a line on it to say they've come round in a carriage to take us for a drive if we'll go."

"Really!" said Dorry, enthusiastically, "the hospitality of these people is astounding. We only met them last night. Imagine that in England! Yes! let's go." The man could speak a little French, and Uli explained that they would be down soon.

When they got down to the drawing-room they were greeted by a hearty voice in very fair English.

"How very kind of you to consent to come! We thought you might like a drive. Where would you like to go? It is all the same to us."

Mrs. Szekely was German, and very fair, rather

pretty, but with a clumsy figure. Her husband was short, and very dark. He spoke no English, but added, in French—

"It is very cold; but you said last night you liked it, so we have the carriage open. If you find it too cold, we can close it."

"No; I love this dry cold," answered Uli. "It's really most kind of you, and, if it is really all the same to you where we drive, could we go to the other side—Buda?"

"Certainly; we will go round by the old fortress—we have plenty of time. We can go by the Burgthor; then, if you are not engaged, will you come back with us to tea at Kugler's? Some people you know are sure to be there."

"We shall be delighted. How good you are! But, oh, Madame, I shall get so fat; I do not care for sweet things as a rule, but I cannot resist the things at Kugler's."

Mrs. Szekely laughed as she stepped into the carriage first and seated herself back to the horses.

"Every one loves Kugler's," she said gaily. "No, Miss Richards!" as Dorry began to protest that she must not sit back to the horses, "that is why I was so rude as to get in first. We do not allow our guests in Hungary to sit on the back seat; please sit down by Lady Branton. There, now we are comfortable. Draw up that fur rug close, the man will tuck it in and button it." She spoke a few words to the footman, and presently they whirled off through the clear air.

"I am so sorry you were not here earlier in the

year," said their host. "You would have so much enjoyed Margarethen-Insel; we all go there in summer. It is very fashionable."

"Yes, I've often heard of it," sighed Uli! "I should so much have liked to go; it looks beautiful, even now, with no leaves."

They had a charming drive nevertheless, and felt most exhilarated by the cold, crisp air. When they arrived at Kugler's the smart confectioner's was crowded. They had a table reserved for them, however, and at it were already seated two men. One of them was a stranger to Uli and Dorry, the other was the man Uli had mentioned in Brett's letter as being about to meet at her cousin's, Mr. Dézso Kertész, and she knew how to pronounce it now. He bent low over the ladies' hands and kissed them; then the other man was introduced. His name sounded like Etelka, but Uli could never make sure of names in this "country of long 'a's,' 'z's,' and 's's,'" as she used to say.

Dézso Kertész was a lean, wiry man, very dark, with straight black hair and moustache. He was almost insignificant till one saw his eyes, which were very deep set, black as night, and with an extraordinary compelling force in them. The whole man gave Uli an impression as if waiting for something; there was something of the primitive savage about him, standing on a height, and looking round with his eagle gaze for his prey. His hands, too, were noticeable; long, olive, and so thin that the cartilage of the fingers traced itself clearly over the back of the hand.

He spoke French fluently in a low, musical voice, a voice so rare in its quality that in the House of Representatives he was called the "Silver-tongued."

He spoke now to the two friends; he made no distinction between them, but his odd eyes were fixed on Uli.

"You sup to-night with the Tihanyis at the Kasino, do you not?"

"Yes," answered Dorry, "Are you going?"

"Yes, I am glad to say. You are to have some of our national dishes, to see how you like them. Madame Tihanyi has ordered Páprikahuhn for you, I know. We like it immensely; I wonder if you will?"

"What is it?" laughed Uli; "it sounds like an ancient document."

He smiled quickly in response. "Oh, papyrus! I see. No, it is not quite so tough as that; it's fowl prepared in a certain way with paprika—I don't know the French for that—you will see. Then we have other things to-night, and some of the country wines too."

"Ah, those I have tasted and like," said Uli. "And we find your cooking superb. Oh, these cakes! I *can't* leave off eating them."

"I hope you will both treat us to music again to-night. It was a very great pleasure to me the other night."

"But how can we?" asked Dorry, with a piece of brandied cake halfway to her mouth. "We can't perform in a restaurant."

"I am sure the band would be delighted," answered

Kertész, gallantly. "But, as a matter of fact, Madame Tihanyi intends us all to go back with her after supper. The restaurants are not very gay at this time of year, and she thinks, too, you will feel happier by her English fire. She is very proud of it, you know."

"As well she may be!" exclaimed Uli, enthusiastically. "It is my ideal in the warming arrangements. I have always said that a room with a stove for warmth, and an open log fire for cheerfulness, would be the acme of comfort; and now, behold! my cousin has it. I just love that library of hers."

The other man bent forward. "Are you speaking of Madame Tihanyi's room?" he asked. "It is charming. I did so much admire your English fires in London, though they would not be of much use in our cold country."

He spoke abominable French; but Dorry caught a few words.

"Oh!" she exclaimed joyfully, "you have been in London? Then you speak English?"

"Verrrry leeetle," said the Hungarian, smiling broadly; "eet ees si diffeecult."

Uli and Dorry laughed. His English was certainly worse than his French. Uli subsided into the latter again.

"Fancy thinking any language difficult after Hungarian!"

"*Hongrois! mais c'est facile!*" he answered quickly, and even Kertész laughed with the rest of them.

Herr Szekely acknowledged that he was glad he had

been born Hungarian, as he quite realized it was almost impossible to learn perfectly for a foreigner.

Kertész bent towards Uli. "I should like to teach you our tongue, Madame," he said gravely. "You speak French so well, I am sure you would learn quickly."

"Ah! but I went to school in France, and had French maids when I was quite small," she answered. "I feel sure I could never learn this language. My mother ought to have taught it to me as a child. Dorry, we must be going; we shall have a scramble to dress, as it is," she added in English.

They bade good-bye to their kind host and hostess, who asked them to supper for a few nights after. Then, with much kissing of hands, they left.

When they reached their hotel they found a box from a florist for each of them. Dorry's contained some lovely pink roses, and Uli's a magnificent spray of curious insect-like orchids. There was no card inside, but they presumed they had come from Herr Tihanyi.

When they arrived at the restaurant, every eye turned and followed them up the room. Uli was looking radiantly beautiful, and Dorry had all the typical smartness of the American woman. The table was decorated with the most lovely flowers, and Uli's cousin, ugly, vivacious, and charming, welcomed them with both hands extended; her husband and the other men kissed hands with the subtle grace born in every one of them, and they each sat down with that

delightful feeling of "being at her best" which rejoices a woman's heart so much. Uli was seated between her host and Kertész. It was quite a small party: Tihanyi's cousins—a brother and sister, with a name Uli never could remember—Kertész, and one other man, a bald-headed, clever-looking Austrian.

Everything went off well, as it always seems to do in Budapest. The food was uncommon, and pleased Uli's palate, much to the delight of her cousin; the wine was excellent, and, of course, the music left nothing to be desired.

As Uli was taking her first spoonful of soup, the band struck up one of those weird, wildly fascinating dances or songs that thrill the musical to the lowest depths. Uli paused and put down her spoon.

"That is my favourite they are playing," she said to Kertész; "it is simply divine. I wish I could play it."

Kertész bent towards her. "I will send it to you," he answered gravely, "though, of course, it sounds better on a band; it needs the zither. It is a song about a dove," he went on softly, so that no one else could hear: "he loses his pet dove. Do you hear? He is now looking for it, and calling it. Ah, he has found it: do you hear the joy? Now he is sad again; the dove has gone. He is calling, calling; there! do you hear how he weeps?"

"Ah, the dove is dead!" cried Uli. "I see, I know." She stared straight ahead of her after the last quivering notes had died away.

"Of what are you thinking, Madame?"

"Some verses," said Uli, dreamily; "I must write them directly I get home; I see it all before me."

"How I wish I could speak English!" said the man, sighing. "I hear you write such exquisite poems."

She did not hear him, the refrain of the wild song was running in her nerves, and the words to fit it seemed born at the same time.

Presently she turned to her host. "I have not yet thanked you for our lovely flowers," she said smilingly, and touching the beautiful orchids on her breast. "How kind you all are to us!"

Herr Tihanyi looked at them with admiration. "They are indeed beautiful; but I did not send them." There was a note of regret in his voice. "It must have been one of the numerous admirers you have succeeded in captivating during your short stay."

Uli looked puzzled. "I can't think who can have sent them; can you help me to guess?"

The man's eyes twinkled humorously. "No, no," he said gaily, "you must find out yourself. I do not know either."

Something made her turn her eyes to her other neighbour.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, as she met that curious piercing gaze, "you sent them! How very kind of you!"

He smiled gravely. "They suit you," he said simply; "you are just like an orchid."

She did not know whether this was meant as a compliment, so she looked down and touched her spray with tender fingers.

"They are very strange," she remarked dreamily; and Kertész made no answer.

It was snowing fast when they came out of the restaurant, and was bitterly cold. Winter had come early this year, and every one agreed it was going to be very severe.

They were all very glad when they arrived at the Tihanyis' warm house; and Uli knelt on the wide, padded guard that ran round the tiled fire-place in the library, and held out her hands to the blazing logs. Her cousin patted her on the shoulder.

"I am so glad my open fire is appreciated," she said smilingly.

Uli looked up at her affectionately. "I just love it! I am a fire-worshipper, you know. I wish I were a cat, and I would curl up inside the fender."

Dorry laughed. "Fancy, Madame," she said quickly, "a strange Mahatma person once told Uli that in a previous existence she was a cat, a sacred Egyptian cat!" and she laughed again. Kertész was quite grave when he bent down to Uli, and said in an undertone—

"Do you believe in reincarnation?"

"I don't know," answered Uli, seriously. "I've thought I did sometimes, and certainly the cat theory is very odd, because I've always adored and understood cats, and they reciprocate my feelings; I have never known a cat who would not come to me. Also I love being stroked, Dorry sometimes strokes me for half an hour at a time, and I long to purr!"

"Personally," said the man, looking at her beautiful

profile intently, "I think the theory of reincarnation so comforting, it accounts for so many things, and why should not the soul evolute as well as the body? 'Progression, progression!' is the cry for everything except for the soul; that apparently was created perfect, and remains stationary amongst all the evolution of the rest."

"I see what you mean," said Uli, musingly; "and you think that accordingly as one treats one's soul in this life, so does it progress or retrogress?"

"Exactly, Madame. If we starve our souls here, if we deliberately live on a lower intellectual plane than we were meant for, then our next incarnation will be on a lower plane; but if we——" Here his hostess interrupted him by asking Uli if she were thawed enough to play.

After some music, somebody asked if Kertész would show them some of his sleight-of-hand tricks.

After one or two remarkably clever jugglings with coins and cards, he turned to look at Uli.

"I will try and do one or two things you have never yet seen, if Madame Branton will help me."

"Certainly," smiled Uli; "but why me?"

Kertész either did not hear her or did not care to answer. He handed her a pack of cards. "While I am out of the room will you look through this pack, pick out with your fingers a card, look at it well, then put it back in the pack and shuffle well, so that you cannot know where it is. Then lay all the cards face downwards in rows on this table, taking care you do not see any of their faces. Then call me."

"But——" two or three voices began.

Kertész smiled, "I may not succeed. I only have twice, with a gipsy; but I shall try." And he left the room.

Uli, surrounded by interested faces, looked through the pack, took out and looked at the five of clubs, then she shuffled well, and followed Kertész's instructions to the letter; when all the cards were face downwards, covering the small table, she had no notion where her card was. Kertész was called into the room. He looked very grave, with a curious far-away look in his eyes. "Keep quite silent, please," was all he said; then he took Uli's right wrist between his fingers and thumb, and told her to shut her eyes. He held her hand over the cards, and began at the first row, lifting her hand and lowering it till her fingers touched the back of each card lightly.

A curious feeling ran up Uli's arm; it was as if an electric battery was sending its waves up to her shoulder. She felt drowsy, and as if her soul were standing apart from her body. Suddenly, as she touched a card, her pulses leaped, and a convulsive movement shut her fingers as if some force quite outside her had closed them.

Kertész stopped. "That is the card," he said, pointing to the last touched. "Will some one look?"

The man who had sat next to Dorry at dinner picked it up and showed it. It was the five of clubs. Every one was silent: a sort of awe seemed to settle down on the company. At last Dorry spoke hurriedly in English.

"What did you feel, Uli?"

"I don't know," answered Uli, in a low voice; then she went on in French, "My pulse seemed to leap of its own accord, and my hand closed, as you saw. I know nothing more."

"Let me do it!" exclaimed Mr. Tihanyi's cousin. "You go out again, and I will choose a card."

"I can't," answered Kertész, shortly; "I can only do it with Madame Branton. I will try something else if you like."

"Yes, yes," every one cried. "What shall it be?"

Kertész took a bunch of keys from his pocket. "Will you lend me your handkerchief?" he said to Uli.

She gave him the square of muslin edged with lace, and he tied the keys in it.

"Now I will go out of the room with Madame," he continued. "While we are gone will you hide this handkerchief, with the keys in it, in some safe place? Then, on our return, with Madame's help, I will try and find it."

He led Uli out of the room and across the hall to a cosy morning-room.

"How is it done?" asked Uli, turning to look at him.

He looked gravely back at her eyes. "We are in complete *rapport*," he answered quietly, "and you are one of the most perfect sensitives I have ever seen. Don't think of anything when we return to them; just keep your mind a blank."

Just then they were called by their host, and they went back into the room. Every one looked interested and

excited. Uli shut her eyes obediently, and Kertész put his hands lightly on her shoulders. She had on a black *crêpe de Chine* dress with a transparent fine lace yoke, and his hands seemed to be burning into her flesh. Her shoulders throbbed and ached, and she moved forward as if she were being pushed by some force unknown to her. She felt faint, and put out her hands blindly in front of her; they caught hold of the edge of an ebony cabinet, and she clung to it for a moment, then unhesitatingly she opened a cupboard in the centre of the cabinet: it was empty. Her nerveless fingers wandered round inside; it was about ten inches square and lined with looking-glass, with its floor of carved wood; she shook from head to foot, she felt as if something were touching her brain, she put one hand quickly to her closed eyes and pressed them; then, with the long delicate fingers of her right hand, she felt about over the carving in the floor of the cupboard; she hesitated for one moment, then pushed and pulled, the entire floor slid out and disclosed a cavity in which lay the handkerchief and keys; she picked them up and turned and dropped them. Then her hands shot out.

"Ivor, Ivor," she cried, "I'm so cold!"

She never knew afterwards who, or if any one, said "*Je t'adore!*" but she felt an arm, trembling but strong, slipped round her, and presently she was sitting in front of the fire holding out her quivering hands to the warmth.

"It's *extraordinary*," cried the host, "simply unbelievable; no one knew of that sliding panel and spring

except my wife and myself. What *is* it? I don't understand."

But Kertész was pouring out a liqueur glass full of brandy, which he brought over to Uli.

"Drink this straight off," he whispered; "it was too much for you."

She stared up at him with wide eyes. "I—I—you!" she began stammering, then she took the glass from his hand and drank the brandy.

Chapter XVI

THE next morning Dézso Kertész called at the Hungaria by arrangement, and took Uli and Dorry to a sitting at the Parliament House. He sat with them in the gallery, and explained who the speakers were. Uli said she wished it were an exciting day, a day when they had rows; and Kertész laughed.

"I'm afraid there's no chance of that," he said; "it's a dull discussion to-day. Yes, I suppose you would enjoy seeing a real row, though for us down there it is more serious."

They both admired the Round Chamber immensely; then they were taken to see the rest of the building, and made the Hungarian very proud by declaring that the staircase was the most magnificent they had ever seen. Uli stood there, with her eyes and head turned up, admiring the beautifully painted ceiling. Dorry had wandered away a short distance and was studying something that interested her.

Suddenly Uli was compelled by some power unknown to lower her head, and she met Kertész's eyes, black as night, shining, and almost brutal in their force; she blushed, to her disgust, but she could not remove her eyes, much as she wanted to. What was happening? she wondered. Was the man hypnotizing her?

Suddenly he bent forward and spoke softly. "Who is Ivor?"

She started violently, but still was obliged to look at him.

"Ivor?" she stammered. "How do you know? What do you mean?"

"You called Ivor last night. I could not understand the rest, you spoke in English; but I heard the name. It is Russian. Who is he?"

Her reason, faintly struggling, told her she need not answer, but her lips opening, answered obediently—

"He is English; he lives in Paris."

"That is why you stayed in Paris so much longer than you anticipated; your cousin expected you here much sooner."

She answered nothing, but her nostrils quivered painfully.

He bent nearer her. "You love him, this Ivor?"

She struggled mentally, the man's eyes were burning into hers; she felt sleepy and strangely vacant-minded. She clasped her hands tightly.

"Let me go! Oh, let me go!" she whispered pitifully.

The black eyes gave one deep flash into hers. "*Never!*" he said quietly, but with curious emphasis; but he turned away at once, and she gave a sobbing sigh of relief.

What did he mean? she wondered, as she took a few rather unsteady steps and joined Dorry; what did anything mean? She must go back to the hotel after

dinner at the Tihanyis', and write a long letter to Ivor. Had she really spoken his name last night? Dorry had not told her; but she must have done so: how else could this strange man know?

She shivered as they went out into the cold air. The snow had stopped, but it was freezing hard, and Kertész had brought his sleigh for them. It had been Uli's first experience of sleighing, and had delighted her.

The sleigh, with its beautiful pair of horses, coloured nets, and jingling bells, was outside now, as they came out from the Parliament House; Kertész had told his driver to come back for them.

"We had better walk down to the tramway," said Uli; "we're going to the Tihanyis' for dinner."

"So am I," said Kertész, quietly; "Madame asked me last night."

"Oh," answered Uli, simply. It did not enter her head that she ought to be conventional and say, "I am so glad."

Dorry said it for her, and they all three got into the sleigh, fastened up the fur rugs, and drove off.

Two nights after, Kertész gave a supper in their honour at a restaurant. He had asked them the first night he had met them. That is a Hungarian's idea of hospitality.

It was a party of ten: the Tihanyis and the cousins staying with them, the Szekelys, a Member of Parliament and his wife who could not speak one word of either French or English and but little German, and

a good-looking Austrian who had something to do with the Court and had come down to Buda to arrange for one of the flying visits of the Emperor.

After supper they all drove off to the National Theatre, where Kertész had engaged three boxes.

The performance was, of course, in Hungarian, and Kertész bent close over the back of Uli's chair and translated rapidly for her in a whisper, while Mrs. Szekely did the same for Dorry in English; the acting was good, and, notwithstanding their ignorance of the language, both Uli and Dorry enjoyed it thoroughly.

When they came out in the passage, Kertész offered his arm to Uli to escort her to the entrance. She took it, and turned to thank him for the delightful evening they had had; he pressed her arm almost roughly.

"Don't say that," he said quickly; "it is for me to thank you: you have given me more pleasure than I can say. Excuse me one moment, I must call for the sleighs. Gottlieb is sleeping at the Hungaria to-night, and will drive Miss Richards home; I will drive you, if you will do me the honour." He pulled up the fur collar of his coat and dashed out.

He saw each of his guests into their carriage or sleigh, and bent low over Mrs. Tihanyi's hand.

"You may trust your cousin and her friend to me, Madame. Herr Gottlieb and myself will see them safe home. *Au revoir.*"

Dorry and Herr Gottlieb got into a small sleigh, and just before they drove off a man who had been running for carriages dashed into Uli, shouting a name, and

nearly knocked her down; she staggered, caught at a pillar, and gave a little cry. In one moment there was pandemonium; Kertész, white with passion, and with his wild eyes blazing, sprang on the man, lifted him with one hand by his collar, and shook him like a dog shaking a rat. The man gave a strangled yell and kicked wildly.

"Oh, don't!" cried Uli. "Let him go; he didn't mean it. Oh, for God's sake, let him go!"

"Stop him!" cried Dorry, clutching Gottlieb's arm; "he's killing him."

A commissionnaire sprang at Kertész; but one swing of his free arm sent the huge man staggering away.

Gottlieb jumped from the sleigh. "Kertész, Kertész," he called loudly, "the man is strangled! Drop him!"

Uli, white as a sheet, stepped forward and laid her hand on Kertész's shoulder.

"Let him go, please," she breathed into his ear. "I *command* you to!"

The iron fingers loosed their hold in an instant, and the man went floundering to the ground.

The excited Hungarian cries ceased, and there reigned almost a complete silence. Kertész, white to the lips, stared blankly at Uli. Gottlieb got back into the sleigh. Dorry was crying from fright, and he patted her hand gently.

"It's all right," he said; "the man is more frightened than hurt. Don't worry any more."

Uli had not recovered her colour, and her hand was clutching her heart, which was beating wildly in

great horrible throbs; she looked from Kertész to the man on the ground, who was just weakly trying to scramble to his feet.

"Speak to him!" she commanded in a whisper.

Kertész stepped forward and put his strong arm round the man's shoulders and helped him to his feet. He spoke a few words in Hungarian, with a gesture towards Uli; then the man turned and muttered a few words to her.

"He is saying that he did not mean to hurt you," translated Kertész.

"No, no; it was nothing," said Uli, in Hungarian, one of the few sentences she knew; and then the tears sprang to her eyes as the rough fellow seized her fur-clad hand and kissed it humbly. She lifted her swimming eyes to Kertész, and he turned away abruptly.

Then he spoke to the man again, and gave him something, and the frightened features melted into the quick Hungarian smile.

Dorry and her escort had driven away, and Kertész handed Uli into his waiting sleigh and bade the driver to go to the Hotel Hungaria.

Uli leant back shivering.

"Are you cold?" he asked anxiously.

"No," Uli answered shortly. Then she added impulsively, "What a brute you are!"

The man winced. "It was unpardonable of me when you were present," he said in his low musical voice; "it drove me mad to see you hurt. I saw red. I wonder I did not kill the poor wretch." Then he

added, after a pause, "Forgive me! The man is happy now; he has enough to keep his family for a week, and I gave him my card and told him to apply to me if he wanted anything. Forgive me! oh, forgive me!"

Uli turned her face towards his and tried to see it; and then, in a moment, the man's strong arms were round her, crushing her till she gasped with pain.

"How could I bear to see you hurt? You are my life, my all. I would kill any one who hurt you, or took you from me." The silver voice, for once, was harsh, and the strong arms crushed round her shook. Again the extraordinary feeling of soul-aloofness took possession of her that always held her when he touched her or met her eyes. She trembled in his arms, but did not draw away. "Kiss me, kiss me," he whispered. "You belong to me, body and soul; you are my mate, you know it."

Her failing will struggled for one moment, then she turned, and let her lips meet his fierce mouth, and felt all the life and soul drawn out of her in that long, mad ecstacy. Was it a kiss? She never knew. She felt as if a god had smitten her mouth with fire; her brain melted, and welded itself into his. She had no separate entity; she was *he*. She saw with his eyes, heard with his ears, felt with his nerves, was very bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh.

When he moved his mouth away, she stared into his wild eyes in the faint light.

"You have made my life a chaos," she murmured, in a stifled voice.

"And you have made my life a heaven!" he answered passionately. "I have been waiting for you so long, Uli. I have waited all my life."

She gave a half-sob, and clung to him. "I am mad," she gasped, "mad. I thought what I had known was love. Now, now—oh, my God, my God, help me!" Her voice was a despairing cry.

"Hush, beloved," he whispered tenderly. "Do not despair, do not wonder. Life has come to you at last with both hands open. My love, my love, my love!"

He crushed her again to him, and hurt her. Then he released her suddenly. The sleigh drew up at the portico of the hotel. Gottlieb was standing inside the glass doors waiting for them, and he ran down and helped Uli out. She leant heavily on his arm; she was weak and tired. She said good night to Kertész in a spiritless voice, and he drove off.

"I am tired," she said gently, when she was in the hall.

Gottlieb kissed her hand sympathetically, and bade her good night. She dragged herself to the lift, and went up with Dorry silently. Outside their rooms she bent and kissed her friend gently.

"I am so tired," she said again. "I must say good night, Dorry. I can't talk."

She entered her room, and stepped out of her furs; then she flung herself on the bed, face downwards, and so she remained motionless till five o'clock in the morning, when she rose, and wearily undressed and crept into bed.

Chapter XVII

DORRY came into Uli's room at half-past nine, and found her still sleeping, with her cold coffee by her side, and the water for her bath rapidly cooling. Dorry looked at her and noticed the blue shades under her eyes and the utter exhaustion of her position, and she decided not to wake her, so slipped softly out of the room. She was puzzled. Uli had looked so ill and worried the night before, and yet with such a curious glow in her face and such bright eyes. She had not been tired at the theatre, Dorry knew, as she had been talking gaily till the moment they had come away. True, there had been the somewhat alarming *contretemps* outside, but it was utterly unlike her friend to break down over an affair of that sort; it might anger her, frighten her at the time, but her nerves were made of stronger stuff than the usual somewhat weak woman's, and, though Dorry had several times been with her when disagreeable incidents had occurred, she had never known them have more than a passing effect on her. She wondered what had happened. Had Kertész mesmerized her? she wondered, and yet she did not appear mesmerized last night. Notwithstanding her declaration that she was tired, she had not looked sleepy; there had appeared something more like a strained wakefulness in her eyes

with their dilated pupils, a queer passionately eager look such as Dorry had never before noticed in her friend.

Presently she gave up her puzzling thoughts and sat down to write to Telbesco. Uli had written two days before to Ivor Talmere, and Dorry had sent a message that she would write to his friend to-day, and she smiled as she started to write. It is always comforting to a woman to know that there is a faithful heart beating for her somewhere.

Uli did not wake till nearly eleven, and her first barely conscious thought was that something good was in the world—her world. The lace frills of her night-gown slipped away from her arms as she stretched them luxuriously over her head, and then her eyes fell on her orchids which she had put in a vase some nights before, and with her arms still stretched out she stared at them with wide eyes. Then she let her arms fall, and a slow red mounted up to her brow. She remembered last night; quickly it all came back to her, and her soul was flooded with a fierce joy such as she had never dreamed of. Then suddenly she gave a little sob in her throat as she thought of Talmere. She pressed her fingers on her eyes.

"I can't help it!" she said despairingly.

She had said truly last night when she told Kertész that he had made her life a chaos. He had suddenly taken possession of her body and soul, as a whirlwind takes possession of the land and sweeps all before it. There had been no volition on her part. She had not even thought of flirting with the man; the whole thing

had come suddenly upon her with such an overmastering power that it was beyond her will to struggle with it. Deep down in her nature was the same fierce blood that raged in Kertész's veins, and the untamed brutality of the man made a huge appeal to her wild heart.

Once she had read a story of Robert Hitchens' where a finely nurtured, educated woman had been carried off willingly by a wild Arab of the desert, and, as she had read, her blood had throbbed with sympathy, and she had said to herself, "That is what I should like."

She knew that, though the veneer of civilization was over Dézso Kertész, yet in his innermost being he remained the wild gipsy of the plains. Then the strength of the man was prodigious; he had held that wretched man off his feet last night with one hand, and she knew that he could sweep her up as easily if he chose, and carry her away. Great physical strength had always appealed to her enormously, and now she glowed with passionate admiration and pride as she thought of Kertész. She knew he was brutal, probably untender, but her whole being was shaken to its foundation by him; she felt now that she should not mind if he killed her, she almost longed to feel those curious, long, lean fingers round her throat, pressing out her life. Her heart beat furiously; she could think of nothing else but Dézso, she put Talmere away from her thoughts with that sob of regret; she had loved him, yes, but how wise she had been in realizing that that *might* not be all! Paris seemed a vague dream to her

now, and yet Dézso's first kiss had been last night only, and she had only known him for ten days.

A knock came at her door, and she awoke from her dream with a start. Henriette entered, carrying a large box, and a letter, which she placed on the bed.

"Oh, Madame! Madame has eaten nothing, and the water is cold! Madame did not ring, so I did not come. Will Madame have some more coffee?"

"No, thank you. I will ring when I want you, Henriette," said Uli, impatiently.

Henriette withdrew, rather offended.

Uli's heart jumped. She knew perfectly who had sent the box and note. With a sort of shy reluctance to open the latter, she opened the box first. A most superb basket of orchids met her eyes; orchids of every known kind, drooping over the sides, climbing up the high gilt handle, and mixing with the bow of white and purple tulle which surmounted it.

"Oh, oh, how lovely!" She remained gazing at them for some time, then slowly, with trembling hands, she opened his first letter. His writing was like him, wild, almost illegible; the accents flew about all over the paper, and were anywhere but over the letters they were meant for.

Except for the opening words, "*Mon adorée*," and a sentence burning like fire at the end, it was not a love-letter. It was a request, or rather, almost a command.

"Do not go to the Tihanyis' for dinner. Send your friend alone, and write a note which will prevent them coming round to see you. Dine at the hotel, and I will

come round after—about two—and fetch you for a drive and tea somewhere. I know we meet to-night at the Szekelys', but I want you to myself this afternoon."

Uli's heart beat quicker; she pressed the letter quickly to her lips, and then hid it under her pillow.

"Dorry!" she called; and Dorry came in from her room.

"Oh, Uli, what flowers! Who sent them?"

Uli hid her face by pretending to look for her handkerchief.

"Mr. Kertész," she answered, as indifferently as she could.

"Oh," said Dorry, simply. "I suppose he wanted to make up for last night. What a brute the man is!"

Uli resented this in her heart, though she had said the same words herself to Kertész.

"You appear quite done up this morning," Dorry went on pitifully. "I came in nearly two hours ago, but you looked so tired I could not wake you; and, my dear girl, you've had no breakfast."

"No," said Uli, "I don't want any; I'll have some cold coffee. I have a bad headache," she blushed a little at the lie; "and I can't go to the Tihanyis'. You must go alone. No, Dorry," as her friend began to protest. "I'd rather be alone and try to sleep. I did not sleep well, and unless I keep quiet I shall not be able to go tc-night to the Szekelys'. I will give you a note to take to Olga, and do prevent her coming round to see how I am or anything. I want to be quiet."

"All right," sighed Dorry, discontentedly. "But I hate leaving you here."

"Nonsense, Dormouse. I shall be perfectly right. You'd better be going, my dear. I will have some dinner up here. Call Henriette, will you?"

When Henriette came she was all smiles again. Her mistress was so very rarely impatient with her that she knew the cause was probably a headache, and she was ready to help in any way possible. She bustled about getting more water, and though Uli had poured out the cold coffee, Henriette saw it was untouched, and after a few minutes' absence she returned with two pots of steaming coffee and milk. Uli was certainly glad of it, and drank two cupfuls thirstily.

Dorry came in dressed in her furs, and said good-bye. "Take care of Madame," she instructed Henriette, "and let her be kept quiet this afternoon. See that she has a nice little lunch sent up; you know what she likes."

Uli sighed with relief when her friend had gone: she felt so horribly guilty, deceiving her like this.

She dressed carefully, she could scarcely prevent herself singing while Henriette was present. She ate the delicately chosen dinner Henriette had ordered, with appetite.

At two o'clock Henriette was in the room tidying up, when the porter brought in a card. Uli pretended to read something on it, then said to the man in English—

"Say I will be down soon." She turned, with wildly beating heart, to the glass. "Henriette," she said,

trying to speak indifferently, "I'm asked to go for a drive; I think I shall. I feel better now, and it will probably quite cure me."

To her relief Henriette did not protest or wonder. "I think Madame is right; a drive always does Madame good."

"I shall be back anyway by six to dress; put out my rose dress," said Uli, as she hurried into her furs.

In a few moments she was running down the stairs; she would not stop for the lift, but in the hall she felt a sudden shyness.

Mr. Kertész is in the salon," the porter told her; but, as he spoke, Kertész came into the hall. He bade her "*bonjour*," and kissed her hand "but as long as all may, or so very little longer;" then he escorted her to the sleigh. He wrapped her up warmly in the rugs, and, as he bent over her, he rested his arm on her knee. She thrilled and drew her breath quickly. He looked up at her from his stooping position, and his eyes glowed into hers.

As they drove off she thanked him in a soft voice for her flowers. He waved his hand as if to put her thanks away from him.

"They are unworthy of you," he said ardently. "I should like to give you a bed and coverlet of tuberoses and orchids."

She laughed a little. "I fear I should die of them, like Zola's heroine," she said gently.

"But what a death!" he answered, smiling at her. "What is life but a tangle of hopes and fears?

"'*La vie est brève,*
Un peu d'espoir,
Un joli rêve
Et puis—bonsoir!'

The *joli rêve* is sometimes worth living for, but——"

She looked at him quickly, a little anxious. "Do not talk so," she interrupted quickly. "You make me shiver."

He slid his arm round her waist under the shelter of the furs.

"*Mon ange!*" he whispered, "I don't want to make you feel unhappy for an instant. I only felt a little oppressed for one moment by my weight of happiness. Don't you feel sometimes as if it could not last when you are very, very happy?"

"No," she answered dreamily, looking into his eyes; "I cannot feel anything now but that it must last. I cannot imagine a *me* without—without——" She broke off embarrassed by the passion of his gaze.

He held her tighter, and every nerve quivered with delicious thrills as she felt his arm tightening.

"You love me?" he whispered, his eyes still on hers. "Say, say!"

She reddened, but said nothing.

"Say," he repeated imperiously; "tell me from your heart."

"I have no heart," she murmured, while her eyes spoke to his eyes.

"Why, what do you mean?" He looked a little startled. "You *had* a heart."

She smiled a strange, sweet sudden smile at him. "Yes," she breathed, "I had a heart. It was stolen from me last night with a kiss."

His eyes seemed shot with fire, he bent forward suddenly, forgetting where they were; but a tram just then hooted wildly as it ran past them, and he drew back quickly, but he squeezed her hand so hard that she gave a gasp of pain.

"I want to take you right away from the world," he said quickly. "I hate all these men hanging over you, and these cackling women. I want at least a few days of perfect peace. I don't mind your friend, she is tactful, but all the rest worry me. I want a few days of you before any one knows. Listen." He went on quickly while they drove through the clear still air. "I asked you to come out to-day, because I want to arrange something. You know I have a little cottage right up in the Carpathians."

"Yes, I think I remember some one saying something about it," answered Uli.

"I want you and Miss Richards to come there for a few days," he continued swiftly. "It is only a shooting box in autumn, but the rooms are comfortable, and I have a bathroom. You know it is far away from anywhere. My cousin partly owns and manages one of the largest sawmills in Europe, and it is right away in the mountains; they have their own railway to bring the boards down to civilized parts, and their own village. A few years ago the wild beauty of the place struck my fancy, and I built this house there; it is about half a

mile away from the village, and five thousand feet above the sea-level. The grandeur of the scenery is beyond all words. Will you come?"

"But," began Uli, rather startled by his suddenness.

"No one could say anything," he broke in quickly, as if divining her objections; "you would both be there, and I have a very respectable housekeeper, an old Russian woman. I know most women would fear the hardships and the journey, but I know you fear nothing, and Miss Richards, I fancy, would enjoy it."

Uli still looked vaguely uneasy; he bent towards her and spoke in a very low voice.

"Say yes, *chérie*," he whispered; "I want us to have that little calm time so much; I want to get to know you better, and you me. Ask your cousin to-night what she thinks? I am sure she would not object. I cannot talk to you in this crowded town, beloved. I want you amongst the sublime loneliness of nature. With the huge snow-laden mountains round us, I think we shall be able to realize more what a great love has come to us. This stone and mortar circumscribes one. I cannot show you one-half I feel. I love you! His breath came unevenly, and again he hurt her hand horribly. "I love you. *Grand Dieu!* do you know how I love you?"

Her hand trembled in his; she nodded quickly.

"No, you don't!" he exclaimed quickly. "And you don't know how you love me. You think, in your heart, I have half hypnotized you. But up in the mountains

you will *know*. We shall be able to read each other's hearts without the continual interruption of a crowd."

She remained silent. How could she refuse him?

He went on after a pause. "To-night, at the Szekely's, I will ask you and Miss Richards. Your cousin will be there, and you can ask her what she thinks."

He smiled a little. He knew perfectly well that Madame Tihanyi was longing to make a match between her cousin and himself, and he thought that she would see in this suggestion, though slightly unusual, the opportunity for her desires being fulfilled, and would raise no objection.

Uli, not knowing what he guessed, thought that her cousin would object; but she consented to leave it to the evening. Personally the idea of the expedition fascinated her; she had never been in any wild country far from civilization, and she longed for it with all the roving blood in her veins.

She did not see her lover alone during the drive, and they had tea in a crowded fashionable place. Coming back she was kissed passionately once in a dark street, but that was all, though enough to set her tingling all over her nervous system.

When she arrived back at the hotel she found Dorry waiting for her in the hall, looking worried and rather cross.

"You drove out with Mr. Kertész!" she said reproachfully.

"Yes," said Uli, kissing her gently. "He came,

and I thought, and Henriette thought, the drive would do me good. It has. I feel ever so much better."

They were in the lift, and Dorry looked at her friend's face wistfully.

"Yes, you look better," she said quietly.

That night at dinner Kertész suggested the expedition to the mountains as though it were a sudden thought. He tactfully asked Madame Tihanyi too, but knew thoroughly that she would not come, as she hated the cold, and long journeys. Also his prophesy to himself was fulfilled. Madame Tihanyi knew the thing was not quite conventional, but quieted her conscience by her knowledge that Kertész would not have suggested it unless he had already fallen in love with her cousin.

"He wants her to know him better," she said sagely to herself; and then, as she noticed his brooding gaze at a man who was bending over Uli, she added, "and he is afraid of the others. Yes, it's not usual; but Miss Richards will be there, and a few days ought to clinch matters."

She spoke more or less in the same strain, in a low voice, to Madame Szekely, who was a great friend of hers, and the pretty German woman nodded wisely.

"A splendid thing!" she whispered. "I had thought of it myself. He's one of the best matches in Budapest."

So the whole thing was settled. Dorry raised no objection, though she felt uneasy; but her fears were so vague that she could not put words to them even in her own thoughts. It was arranged that they should

start in a few days. It was a long journey, and they would have to sleep a night at a place called Kassof *en route;* but both the women felt somewhat excited at the prospect, especially as they would be the first English-speaking women who had ever gone up to Bá, the name of the village on the mountain where the sawmill was.

Chapter XVIII

A FEW days afterwards, at about half-past nine in the evening, in a heavy snowstorm, Uli and Dorry met Dézso Kertész at the station. Mr. and Mrs. Tihanyi were there to see them off, and many were the instructions Uli's cousin gave to Kertész as to the care he was to take of his charges. Mrs. Tihanyi had been distinctly relieved to hear that they were to sleep the next night at the house of Kertész's cousin at Kassof; Mrs. Tihanyi knew Mrs. Géza Kertész, and was satisfied that she would take good care of her guests.

There were only seven first-class passengers on the train, and Uli and Dorry were the only women. Kertész said a few words to the conductor, and the result was quite a spacious sleeping-apartment for Uli and Dorry. The man opened a door between two compartments, pulled down and arranged the lower berth in each, so that instead of a small carriage with no room in which to move, they had the double compartment all to themselves.

They decided to go to bed at once, and get up fairly early in the morning, so as to see the country. Kertész glanced round with eagle eyes.

"Are you sure you have everything you want?" he asked anxiously. "The man will bring your coffee

and rolls when you ring in the morning. Mind, if you want anything at all, don't hesitate to call me; I am only in the next compartment. You must promise, please, because the conductor understands nothing but Hungarian."

Uli set his mind at rest, and he bid them good night with a long look into Uli's eyes.

Hungarian trains do not hurry themselves, so there was none of the terrific shaking and swaying that is so trying to the nerves and head in an express train, and the friends had a fairly good night. A delicious *déjeuner* was brought them at eight o'clock. The snow had stopped falling, but it was very deep on the ground, and the plough on the engine threw it up in great heaps to right and left.

They were not dressed till past ten; they found it a lengthy process—as every one does—dressing in the circumscribed space, especially as they had to take it in turns to go to the lavatory to wash. There was plenty of really hot water, and they both felt exceedingly refreshed, though somewhat out of breath, when they were ready. Uli rang the bell, and when the conductor came she waved her hands in pantomime at the beds. He nodded, with a quick flash of white teeth, and proceeded to fasten up the beds, and turn the carriage into an ordinary one again.

Dézso passed as he was doing this, and they called out gaily to him. Their spirits were high; they both felt as if they were embarked on a wild adventurous voyage, and adventure appealed to each of them.

Kertész looked younger and gayer; he greeted them heartily.

"I heard you moving ages ago," he said, laughing; "but a woman's dressing is a long affair, especially without a maid, and in a wee place like this." He stepped along to his carriage, and then came back with two small sprays of flowers in his hand. He gave one to each of them. "Just to make you feel you are not absolutely lost to civilization," he said, smiling.

Dorry launched herself into wondering thanks. Uli said nothing, but, as she smelt her tuberoses, she put her hand over his round the corner of the door. Dorry was standing between the compartments, and could not see. She knew he had brought the flowers with him. She had seen and wondered at a flat basket last night, and his thoughtfulness pleased her.

"You may as well join us now," said Dorry. "Our carriage is apparently clothed and in its right mind again. And, oh, do you think you can find us an ash-tray? We've been flinging our ashes under the seats hitherto, and it's such a bother."

Her French had distinctly improved since she had come from England, but Kertész smiled broadly at her pronunciation as he asked the conductor to bring some saucers.

They had a really splendid dinner on the train, and arrived at Kassof at two o'clock, and were met at the station by Mr. and Mrs. Géza Kertész, all hearty delight and beaming hospitality. Géza was very unlike his cousin, a man about fifty, insignificant and ugly,

but clever-looking and grave. They both spoke French, and Madame spoke a little English.

The snow was four feet deep, and the thermometer stood at sixteen degrees below zero Centigrade. There were two large sleighs to meet them, and another for their luggage. Kertész left a wooden case at the station; it contained provisions that he was taking up to Bá the next day.

The Gézas had a large flat, and Mrs. Géza welcomed them to it with a rattle of words.

"You must excuse me if I talk too much," she said laughingly. "We see no one here. Our house is at Buda, you know, and I go down next week. I am never here in the winter; it is too dull. In the summer I have people to stay, and in autumn a good many people come to their shoots about here. It is very brave of you to come in the winter. I have never been up to Bá myself in the snow."

"I love the snow," said Uli. "I can't imagine anything so beautiful as those distant mountains all covered with snow, and the sun turning everything into diamonds."

Mrs. Géza shuddered. "Oh, if you like the snow, you will like Bá. My husband could not get up there to-day; they had not cleared away the snow enough for the railway. Five hundred of his men have been at it ever since four o'clock this morning, and they will go on till to-morrow morning, then he will go up with you, if they telephone that the line is clear; if not, you will all have to wait till the next day. Winter has

come very early this year. I do not stay after the snow has come, as a rule. Now, would you like to come out and see our quaint little town? I can telephone for the sleighs. Do you feel sufficiently rested?"

Uli and Dorry acquiesced eagerly, and they all sallied forth wrapped to the eyes in furs. Uli and Dorry had each bought a cloth hood, made all in one piece, with a pointed top and long ends to wind round the neck, and they were exceedingly thankful for them now. Although the air was perfectly still, it was colder than they had ever known it, and the breath froze on the men's moustaches until the hairs looked like separate spears of ice. They thoroughly enjoyed seeing the curious town with its cosmopolitan inhabitants, the old fifteenth-century fortified church, and the triple bridges. When they first went out, Uli was in the sleigh with Mr. and Mrs. Géza, but after seeing the church Dézso manœuvred cleverly, and succeeded in getting Uli to himself for the rest of the sightseeing. Mrs. Géza gave a quick glance at them, smiled a little to herself, and when they were in the sleigh said something in Hungarian to her husband. He raised his eyebrows humorously; he had wondered why his cousin had come at this time of year, and had been amused at the number of telegrams he had received, giving elaborate instructions to pass on to Dézso's housekeeper. Now, if his wife was right, he understood, and he was still more amused at the confirmed bachelor being caught at last.

"Your friend is very beautiful," he said aloud to Dorry, and Dorry beamed upon him with whole-hearted

delight, and entered into a long dissertation on the beauty and talent of her friend.

Mrs. Géza smiled at her enthusiasm, but admired her for it.

"Indeed, you have a wonderful friend," she said; "I'm glad she is not only beautiful. Dézso ought to consider himself lucky if she marries him."

"What?" exclaimed Dorry, sitting bolt upright. "Marry *him*—Mr. Kertész?"

The husband and wife both laughed heartily at her astonishment.

"How do you know? What—has he said anything?" continued Dorry, too agitated to be coherent.

"No, no," answered Mrs. Géza, soothingly. She thought her emotion came from the natural jealousy of a hitherto inseparable friend. "He has said nothing, and we may be wrong, but he has never asked any other woman up here, and he has been so very fussy about having everything comfortable, and we thought——" Just then the light of a lamp shone full on the sleigh in front of them, and gave them a fleeting glimpse of Kertész, as he bent over Uli, tucking the furs round her more securely. She had lifted her face to his, and they just caught sight of them as Dézso lifted his hand, and, with an unmistakable tenderness, pulled her hood more forward.

Mrs. Géza gave a little amused shrug and laugh; but Dorry felt miserable, and did not say another word till they reached the house. She was very fond of Talmere, and for the first time she began to fear for him.

She went into Uli's room that night with the intention of saying something, but the moment she mentioned Kertész's name there appeared a curious, rather haughty aloofness in Uli's manner that frightened her, so she turned the subject and went to bed, and worried over it for an hour before she fell asleep.

The next morning, at half-past seven, a maid brought in their coffee and rolls, and Mrs. Géza appeared in a dressing-gown at the same time, to tell them that they had received a telephone message that the line was clear enough to go, so the sleighs would be round to take them to the station at a quarter to nine. Their bright little hostess saw them off at the station, and she had provided some sandwiches and wine, as, though the distance to Gétsza, where they would have lunch, was only forty miles, their train would probably take anything between three and four hours to get there. She also brought a small box of flowers from her conservatory, saying it would "make their rooms look more homelike."

All the officials of the station and train made a great fuss over them. Mr. Géza was the manager and junior partner at Bá, and from Gétsza the private railway began belonging to the Bá firm.

They were very glad of the sandwiches and wine, as they did not reach Gétsza until nearly one o'clock. They had passed through the most beautiful snow-covered plains *en route*, always mounting slightly towards the Carpathians, at the foot of which was situated the little town of Gétsza, which was the

railway loading-station for all the Bá productions, and consequently there was a very extensive depôt there, and the stacks and stacks of sawn wood interested Uli and Dorry immensely. They had lunch at an *employé's* house, the foreman of the loading department, Mr. Géza explained, who counted and tallied the boards before they were sent on by the state railway. He gave them a very nice simple meal, and he and his wife waited on them themselves.

Through a half-open door Uli caught sight of a constant procession of strange faces, which peered at them, and gave place to others; evidently they excited a good deal of interest amongst the population of Gétsza, and Uli felt as if she were visiting a far-away strange country for the first time.

After lunch the foreman spoke to Mr. Géza, and he looked rather worried and entered into a brisk conversation.

"Nothing bothering, I hope?" asked Uli, kindly.

"Oh, it's nothing much," answered Mr. Géza, smiling; "only a man who was rather a good workman got caught in the machinery up at the mills this morning, and was killed."

Uli felt rather sick; the "nothing much" seemed to her rather unnecessary.

"Was he married?" she asked after a moment.

"Yes; one child."

"Oh, that's why you're worried, I suppose?" said Uli, simply. "Is the Employers' liability heavy here?"

Mr. Géza laughed amusedly. "We have none of that

nonsense here," he said grimly. "We have no liability whatever."

"What?" cried Uli, rather horrified. "Then what do you give the wife?"

"Nothing," answered the man, abruptly. "Oh, don't worry, Madame; her brother will take her in until she marries again."

"Suppose she does not want to marry again?" asked Uli; she felt as if the clock had been put back some decades, and as if she were talking to a slave-owner.

Mr. Géza looked really amused; he could not understand the point of view.

"She'll have to. They all do," he answered shortly.

"Perhaps they saved money," said Uli, trying hard to comfort herself; "how much did the poor man get?"

Mr. Géza smiled broadly. "Oh, the same as the rest of them, four gulden a week. I don't think he could save much."

Uli sat down suddenly on her chair. "*Four gulden a week!*" she cried; "why, that makes a shilling a day! Is that really what they get?"

Mr. Géza looked rather uncomfortable, not because he was conscious of wrong, but at her expression.

"They get their houses, lighting, and firing free," he said almost apologetically, "and these people live on very little, almost entirely on cereals."

Uli got up and looked out of the window. "Yes," she said bitterly, "they would have to."

Just then Dézso and Dorry, who had gone out, came

back to say that the train was ready to take them up. They all went out, and found a long train of empty trucks waiting for them, with a closed waggon for the private party. It was exactly like an ordinary luggage truck, but had seats round it inside, and a window and stove. It was four miles uphill, and the whole way on each side bore evidences of the huge industry that was carried on up in the mountain. Mr. Géza explained the different piles of wood as they passed; it was all very technical, and the women could understand little. In three-quarters of an hour they arrived at the foot of the cable railway which was to take them up to the top of the mountain. Uli and Dorry felt somewhat excited as they looked at the steep line, one thousand three hundred yards high as Mr. Géza explained.

"You see," he said, pointing, "cables work the trucks. It is a wonderful piece of engineering; the weight of the descending full truck pulls up the empty one from down here, thus almost entirely dispensing with motive power, which is in fact only used for starting and stopping purposes and for controlling the brakes. Where the lines diverge in the middle, is where the trucks pass each other. The full ones carry about ten tons of sawn boards. About seventy to eighty pass up and down in the day."

He spoke proudly, and looked intensely pleased at the evident interest of the two women. They all four sat themselves down on their luggage on an empty truck and smothered themselves in rugs, and with a call from above they began to ascend. It was a curious

sensation, and Uli could not help wondering, "Suppose the cable broke!" It was bitterly cold, below zero Fahrenheit, though the sun was shining brightly. The view from the top made the quick tears rise to Uli's eyes, and Dorry caught her hand and held it tight while they gazed. All around them was the thick forest covered with snow, the spruce trees of all sizes bending, overweighed with their load of pure, sparkling whiteness; below at their feet stretched the plain they had traversed in the day, looking like a vast silver, glittering sea, and beyond were range after range of snow-covered mountains thirty to forty miles away.

"And they keep saying they wish we'd come in the summer!" breathed Uli, "just as if summer can show anything like this exquisite purity."

Mr. Géza and Dézso were fussing about, talking to one or two men and looking very cross. Presently Dézso came up to where they were standing and spoke apologetically.

"I am so sorry, but there appears to be some misunderstanding about our engine; the empty train went back to Bá half an hour ago, and we have to wait for another engine to come back. They've telephoned for it, but I'm afraid it will be some time. I'm sure it's Géza's fault," he added, looking furious.

"It doesn't matter a bit," said Uli and Dorry together, trying to soothe him; but the frown remained on his brow.

"You can't stay out here," he went on crossly; "you'd freeze to death. It's twenty below zero

Centigrade. Come into the engine-house; we will try and make you as comfortable as possible there, and at least it's warm."

The engineer received them courteously, and produced two chairs and an empty soap-box for them. Kertész wrapped them round carefully with the rugs, and they sat by the window and watched the trucks coming up and going down. On some of the empty ones that arrived up were strange, wild-looking men and women, carrying sacks. They could not see them very plainly from where they were, but Kertész explained that they were from Bá, and were returning there after having been down to Gétsza to buy provisions. "Most of the men who are coming up have been clearing the line down there, so their wives seized the opportunity to go down to Gétsza and shop, and come up with them."

Various people opened the door and looked in, but, seeing the engine-house occupied, vanished again suddenly.

It was nearly two hours before the engine came back from Bá for them, and the cousins had been fuming off and on the whole time. At last the "train" was made up. An engine went first, then thirty-two empty trucks, and then their covered waggon, like the one they had had from Gétsza, with a stove in it. Uli's and Dorry's bags were in with them, and Dézso's portmanteau and case of provisions were on the open truck preceding them; on this truck and the one before it was a wild, weird lot of people seated, with their legs hanging down all round. They all gazed in a vacant, utterly

uninterested way at Uli and Dorry as they passed them, though they were probably the only Anglo-Saxons they had ever seen; on only one or two of the faces was there the slightest spark of curiosity, and Uli sighed as she noticed it.

"What can you expect?" she said to Dorry, in English. "They live only the lives of animals, just keeping body and soul together."

And she told Dorry what she had heard about their conditions of labour. The American was indignant.

"And they talk about our slaves!" she snorted; she was a Southerner. "Why, their circumstances at the worst were not worse than this."

It was almost dark when they started, but the snow made it light enough to see the magnificent scenery they passed through for an hour, ever mounting, winding, twisting, twining, sometimes at the sheer edge of a precipice, with a valley of snow trees below them on one side, and rocks on the other.

Sometimes the engine was out of sight round a corner, and all they could see was the shower of sparks it sent back, each spark reflected and multiplied a million times by the snow on the trees. It was like fairyland, and Uli and Dorry were speechless with wonder and delight. Dézso sat opposite Uli, and regarded her face with a passionate love on his own. Yes, he was glad he had brought her here, he thought. Once get up to the house and he would have her nearly to himself.

Chapter XIX

THEY steamed into Bá through a long line of irregular wooden huts, all hung with icicles many feet long. The snow was four feet deep, and narrow foot passages had been cut in many places. Over all shone great electric arc lights, giving the scene a weird unreal appearance, and making the snow and icicles sparkle like millions of diamonds. The only sound was the regular throb, throb, of the engines in the sawmill, which continued always, night and day, like a great hungry giant asking for more, more, more without ceasing.

Uli and Dorry stood outside, and looked around, the whole place was as light as day.

"How do you get electric light up here?" Dorry asked wonderingly.

Mr. Géza laughed. "Oh, we have our own dynamo, of course," he answered, handing down his bag to a man. "We have no gas or lamps anywhere, every house is electric lighted. You see, everything is of wood, and if there were a fire all would be up with us. Now, Dézso, you can't be sent on till they've shunted off the empty trucks; will you bring the ladies up to my house?"

"I should love to stay down here for a little," answered Uli, for herself; "it is all so curious and charming to me."

"Very well," acquiesced Mr. Géza. "Dészo will show you round, if you like. I must leave you for ten minutes or so, if you will excuse me. My clerk is up at the house."

The moment he had ascended the many steps leading to his house, which clung to the steep side of an eminence overlooking the whole village, Uli turned and regarded the heterogeneous crowd of people that had travelled up with them hauling down their sacks and goods from the trucks. Never was there such a collection of rags. There were Magyars, Saxons, Roumanians, Russians, Armenians, and several others, and hardly two were dressed alike, except that all their rags bore a strong family likeness to each other. A good many had sheepskin coats and caps, with the wool outside. One man was done up in sacks, bound round the waist with a thong of leather. Nearly all had on fur caps of some sort, the Russians of sealskin, drawn right down over the ears; and nearly all had their feet and legs, to the knee, done up in the same manner. A piece of skin, or leather, of no particular shape to start with, had eyelet holes bored through the edges, and this was laced up with string on the foot and leg, over an extraordinary collection of rags of all sorts. Uli counted nine pieces of different stuffing in one man's leg equipment, ranging from straw, and the skin of a sheep, to pieces of linen.

The tears rose to her eyes as she looked at them all, so indifferent, so animal like. They reminded her of a bear at the Zoo, that always looked out of his cramped

cage with lack-lustre eyes, noticing nothing, caring for nothing.

Presently she turned suddenly to Dézso, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Dézso," she whispered.

He thrilled at her touch and voice, and bent quickly towards her.

"Dézso," she continued, "you know that man who was killed. I want you to take me to his wife. Now, dear, at once."

Then, as she saw his astonished hesitation, she added quickly—

"Do, dear, if you love me. I—it will comfort me. I want to take her something."

"Can't I take it for you, Uli? Why should you go?"

Dorry came up, and asked what they were talking about, and Uli explained.

The American settled the matter. "Come on," she said decidedly. "Where is it?"

Dézso shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and spoke to one of the men, who mumbled a few guttural words, and turned and went down one of the cut-out paths. The others followed in single file. Kertész was behind, and noticed, for the first time, that Uli was carrying a small box. "Allow me," he said, trying to take it from her. But she shook her head, and clung to it. They passed the huge sawmills, with the ceaseless throb of the engines and the curious qrr—r—iss of the sawn-through wood. The village was very neat; small, wooden houses in rows, one or two better ones for the

clerks, the doctor, and chemist (there were no shops), and a largish, low, rambling, well-built place, which Kertész told them was the club, which made Uli wonder, and feel a little less miserable about the workmen's condition. Then their escort stopped, and pointed to the door of a cottage. Kertész knocked, and a woman, with a skin hood on, opened it. He said a few words to her, and turned to Uli.

"Will you tell her how sorry I am to hear of her loss?" said Uli; and Dézso translated. The woman looked dully at them. Then Uli stepped forward. "He is not here, I suppose?" she asked. Dézso explained that he would be at the mortuary. Then Uli opened her purse and gave the woman a banknote of ten gulden, and Dorry produced the same. The woman stared at the notes blankly, and then looked at Kertész. He told her what they were, and that they were to keep her from want. She murmured some words of thanks, but the dull look remained in her eyes.

"You see," said Kertész, "it's no good doing anything for them; they don't understand."

"Never mind," answered Uli. "She'll understand when she has food instead of starvation." Then she borrowed Dézso's knife, and cut the string round the box. It was full of the hot-house flowers Mrs. Géza had given her in the morning. She handed them to the woman. "Will you tell her they are to put on his coffin?" and Kertész translated.

An extraordinary change came over the woman's face. She stared wildly at Uli for one moment; then,

putting the box down on the step, she flung herself on her knees in the snow, seized Uli's fur-clad hand and kissed it passionately, the tears streaming down her face, and uttering short, staccato phrases. The tears sprang to Uli's eyes as she bent and lifted her to her feet; but the poor wretch knelt again and kissed the hands of Dorry and Kertész. The latter lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"It appears you have touched her by the flowers," he said grimly. "Money could not do it." Then he spoke a few words to her; she nodded, and picking up the box of flowers, she trudged off towards the mortuary. They turned away. Uli was choking. Dézso touched her hand gently. "*Adorée*," he murmured, "you teach us humanity. I have told her to get some one to write to me if she is ever in want—for your sake."

When they got back Mr. Géza was waiting by the engine and the covered waggon. The empty trucks had been shunted off.

"You have seen round?" he asked gaily. "That's right. Now, Dézso, you must bring the ladies back to supper. I will tell the engine-driver to wait for you."

Dézso did not think it wise to refuse. He knew that Géza was going away the next day up to the other mill, and he thought it best to spend this evening with him.

"Eight o'clock," called out Géza, as they all got into the waggon, "and you can be taken back when you like. I expect the ladies will be tired."

"You see this line goes on to the other mill," explained Dézso, as they were steaming along, "and it

passes my house *en route*. There is no other means of getting about here, except the feet."

In a quarter of an hour they arrived at the house, of course built of wood, and elevated on the side of a mountain.

The engine-driver carried up the luggage, and the door was opened by an old woman with a charming wrinkled smiling face—the first smile Uli had seen in Bá, as she remarked in English to Dorry. She was Russian, and spoke very little of anything else. The moment they were across the threshold, she knelt and kissed the hems of the dresses of Uli and Dorry, and they both smiled upon her, and Uli said, "Greeting," in Hungarian. The old woman smiled again, and at her master's bidding, preceded them to their rooms.

"Talk about roughing it!" cried Dorry, as they entered. "I call this luxury." They had two communicating rooms, furnished in the most comfortable style. Double windows, and huge white tile stoves which made the whole place warm. The servant trotted away again with a beaming smile at both of them, and in a few minutes she returned with tea and bread and butter and cakes. The tea was good and strong, there was no milk, but a lemon cut in slices.

In a few moments Kertész asked if he might enter. "I'm so sorry," he said regretfully, "there's no milk. I brought some up with me, but I hear it's not fit for use; the cream has all separated and turned to butter, more or less. Do you mind lemon very much? I've got some milk coming up from Gétsza to-morrow

morning, for your coffee." He looked so distressed over it, that they both laughed.

"Don't be so bothered," answered Uli, smiling into his eyes; "we neither of us mind lemon, in fact, I rather like it for a change."

He showed them the sitting-room, which was on the same floor; a very simple but comfortable room, and he said his only regret was that he had no piano. There was a zither and a mandoline, and Uli assured him she could play the latter a little (she looked at Dorry out of the corner of her eye, and that young lady blushed), and Dorry could sing to it. He then showed them the bathroom, which was a luxury he rather prided himself on. There was plenty of hot water, heated from the kitchen below.

"Whenever either of you want a bath, just call out *fürdö* to the servant, and she will prepare it for you."

"I call out *fürdö* now," laughed Dorry; "I always feel grubby after a journey."

"And I too," said Uli; "*fürdö, fürdö!*"

"All right, I'll tell her," said their host, smiling. "I'll leave you to get unpacked and change. If you're ready by a quarter to eight it will be time enough."

They enjoyed an excellent supper, and all agreed that they would go as far as the other sawmill with Mr. Géza the next day, have lunch there, and then they could come back with the full trucks in the afternoon, leaving Mr. Géza there.

This they did, and Uli enjoyed it immensely, so did Dorry, till coming back about four in the afternoon, she

had to lie down in the waggon with a most fearful headache. The other mill was somewhat higher than Bá, and over six thousand feet above sea level; and the cold was intense, twelve degrees below zero, Fahrenheit; and the rarified atmosphere had evidently given her mountain sickness. When they got back to Kertész's house, he sent on word by the engine-driver to tell the doctor to come up, and in about an hour he arrived on an engine. He was a kind-looking, capable man, and spoke German fluently. He ordered Dorry straight to bed, gave her a cachet to take, and said she was to have some soup only at seven o'clock, and after it another cachet, which he gave Uli. Her temperature was 102, and she looked really ill.

"She will go to sleep after the second cachet," he said to Uli as he left. "Do not wake her on any account, she will probably be all right in the morning; people who are not used to it constantly get feverish when they come up here for the first time. You feel well, yourself?" added he, looking at Uli interestedly.

"Quite, thank you," answered Uli, smiling. "My temperature is naturally always higher than most people's, but I very rarely get headache or fever. I feel particularly well, as a matter of fact; this cold suits me admirably."

She fussed over Dorry after the doctor had gone, and put her to bed, and gave her a strong cup of tea.

At seven, the old servant, looking very sympathetic, brought up an excellent cup of clear soup, which Dorry roused herself with a groan of pain to drink. Then

shortly afterwards Uli gave her the cachet, and watched by her side till she fell into a deep sleep.

Shortly before supper time, Uli entered the sitting-room where Kertész was. She had changed into a loose Empire velvet tea-gown of a curious blue colour, with a band of fur across the breast and round the open sleeves. Dézso rose as she entered.

"My queen!" he said tenderly, "you look truly regal in that gown; and how the blue suits you!" He took her into his arms and kissed her. "Do you know, sweet, it is hateful of me, but I can't be very sorry Miss Dorry is not here," he said, looking into the eyes raised in adoration to his; "I know she will be all right in the morning, and I suppose she is sleeping now?"

"Yes, peacefully."

"That's all right. She will probably sleep till the morning, and we are practically alone, my beautiful love." He held her face between his long, nervous fingers and looked right down into her eyes. "Are you sorry, Uli? For me it has been very tantalizing these last three days, hardly ever seeing you alone. A snatched kiss is no kiss at all. We will sit over the stove with the door of it open to-night, and you and I will talk and talk, and—— Here's supper!" He broke from her abruptly, as he heard the clatter of dishes outside the door, and the Russian came in with the first steaming course.

"She won't let any one wait but herself," Kertész said, smiling; "I offered to get some one from the village, but she would not hear of it."

Uli smiled at the beaming old face. "Why should she? She does splendidly; and, personally, the sight of her cheerful face does me good, after——" she stopped.

Dézso looked up quickly. "After those faces down at Bá, you would say! Ah, well, they're a sullen lot."

"Don't let's talk about it," said Uli, shuddering. "I want to be happy, to-night."

They chatted and laughed during supper, and Kertész gave her some good champagne.

"The kind you like!" he said, smiling, as he poured out some in her glass, "'Dry, as shipped to England,'" he quoted from the label on the bottle.

"You really ought to learn English," said Uli, laughing; "you have an excellent accent."

"You shall teach me, sweet, when we are married," he said, laying his hand over hers; "if you make love to me in English I shall soon learn!"

Uli's eyes sparkled. "Darling, I love you!" she answered in English.

He flashed a glance at her eyes. "Ah, but your eyes translate for me," he said softly; "a good teacher must not let her eyes be seen."

"Do you love me?" asked Uli, still in English, but looking at the glass in her hand.

"*Oui, avec toute mon âme!*" he answered, quickly.

"Ah, you will soon learn!"

After a short time she exclaimed, "Dézso! How is it you have given me all the things I like to eat?"

Kertész laughed. "I brought them up in that case you saw."

"And you remembered everything I've ever said I liked."

"Of course," answered Kertész, carelessly; "why should I not? Now, come by the fire and we will have the coffee on this little table, and she can clear away. I'm sorry I have only the one sitting-room, but it is usually enough for me and the men who come here."

He wheeled a huge sofa nearer the stove, and made her sit down in a corner of it; he put a large cushion for her feet, and opened the stove door.

"Now we are cheerful!"

He said something to the servant as she finished clearing away, after putting down their coffee and liqueurs on a table by their side; she curtsied, beamed upon him with her kind old face, and withdrew.

"I want you to taste this liqueur," he said, as he poured her out a glass from a very old queer-shaped bottle; "one can hardly buy it now; I am sure you will like it."

"It's delicious!" said Uli, sipping daintily. "Oh, what a nice dinner—supper, I mean—you have given me. I'm afraid I'm very material, Dézso; I love good food and wine."

Kertész laughed at her. "My dear," he answered quite gravely, "every sensitive person has a good palate! A few gross people, too, I acknowledge, but they have produced it by careful practice; with the sensitive it is natural." Then he went on, after a moment's pause,

"I think all your five senses are very highly developed. Your sight is very good, I know, your hearing is exceptionally keen, your taste we have just been talking about, your sense of smell is peculiar. I've often noticed it, but more intense than any, perhaps, is your sensitiveness to touch; I think your nerves must be very acute."

As he spoke he laid the tips of his fingers on the back of her neck very gently. Then he pushed up the wide sleeve and ran his fingers down her arm, from the top to her fingers, two or three times. The white flesh seemed to electrify under his touch. Her eyes that were looking at him dilated, and her nostrils quivered.

He put his finger against her nose. "Why do you do that," he whispered; "it sends me mad."

"What?" asked Uli, nervously.

"Your nostrils," he said in the same intense voice, "they quiver like a hunted stag's."

Uli did not answer; she stood up quickly, and laid her hands along the tiles of the stove high up to warm them.

Kertész looked at the graceful figure with uplifted arms, with a beating heart. Then, sitting still behind her, he put up his hands, and held her body under the arms, then slowly, slowly he let them slide down her sides, over the beating heart, over the beautifully curved hips, and down to her feet.

"You divinely made woman!" The words were hardly audible.

She stood there shaking from head to foot, her heart

was pumping warm blood into every quivering vein in her body, and exquisite fine thrills of maddening sensation were tingling her whole nervous system, her hands were still pressed on the tiles, but she did not feel their warmth, she felt nothing, nothing but the intoxicating nearness of the man who commanded her heart. Then she felt the thin, strong hands she loved placed round her breasts, and she was drawn backwards into his arms. He pressed her head back till it rested on his shoulder, and his burning mouth fastened on hers.

Some hours afterwards Uli entered her room and stared at herself in the glass. The merciless electric light fell on her face as she looked at it.

> "'By lips the truest Love ere turned
> His heart's own tint. One night they kissed
> My soul out in a burning mist!'"

she said aloud. She pushed the hair further from her face.

"'A burning mist,'" she repeated; "that just describes it."

She walked dreamily across the room to Dorry's door and opened it gently. A small light in a glass of oil was burning, casting a dim, faint glow around. She went over to the bed; at that moment Dorry opened her eyes and looked at her. Uli started back slightly and tried to say something. Dorry sat up quickly, and turned on the electric light. She stared at Uli, then she turned and looked at the travelling-clock by her side; it was half-past two.

Dorry's eyes passed slowly over Uli, then they distended.

"Uli!" she cried hoarsely, "you—oh, my God, you haven't——" she broke off, panting.

Uli flung up her arms over her head with an exquisite abandonment, her face irradiated joy.

"Yes, I *have*, Dorry!" she cried, "I have, and it's *worth it*, it's *worth* it!"

But Dorry burst into a violent flood of tears and fell back and hid her face in the pillow.

Chapter XX

THE news of the engagement of Dézso Kertész to Lady Branton caused an immense sensation in Budapest. Naturally, as he was a very eligible *parti*, a few mothers and their daughters were disappointed, but on the whole people were pleased, and Uli was inundated with callers and invitations.

She and Dorry had stayed at Bá a few days longer than they had intended, and on their return they went to stay with Mrs. Tihanyi, as her husband's cousins had left, and her two spare rooms were free.

Mrs. Tihanyi was delighted; she had never had any children of her own, and she now mothered Uli to her heart's content. She wanted the marriage to take place at once, and could not in the least understand why Uli said that they must wait till the *decree nisi* was made absolute. Uli tried to explain what this meant, but it was rather difficult getting her cousin to realize that people had to wait six months after they were divorced before they could legally marry again. However, she comforted herself with the knowledge that Uli would stay with her till the end of January, or the beginning of February, when the wedding would take place from her house. She planned a week or so with her cousin in Vienna in January, to buy the trousseau, and her

heart rejoiced at the anticipation. She insisted on Dorry staying too, and, miserable as Dorry was, she felt she could not leave her friend at this crisis in her career.

As for Uli, she lived in a dream. She appeared hardly to be conscious of existence except when Kertész was present, when she roused herself, and felt she was indeed living. She seemed to live as she had never lived before, her whole soul bound up in another's, and her very senses swayed by his. She felt as if she breathed only when he was present, when she saw with his eyes and felt with his flesh. It was an obsession.

Certainly the man was apparently just as love-ridden as she was, and his attentions left nothing to be desired: he never failed her in any smallest particular. Any half-expressed wish of hers was instantly gratified; no trouble appeared too great for him to take which won him a pleased smile from his love's eyes.

One day at a *soirée* at the Tihanyis', a dowdy plain woman sat down on a sofa by his side and began speaking. Kertész's natural courtesy prevented him being actually rude, but in the course of a minute he got up abruptly, with a few words of smiling excuse, and went over to the music-stand and began searching for something. He felt a touch on his arm, and Uli stood by his side.

"Why did you run away from that woman?" she asked gently.

"She's hideous," said Kertész, smiling into his *fiancée's* beautiful eyes. "All ugly women ought to be shut up, unless they are charming, like your cousin."

Uli looked across at the solitary figure sitting on the sofa.

"She's old, and rather pathetic," she answered quietly. "I wish I could talk to her; but we can't meet in any language."

Then she spoke of other things until her cousin asked her something, and she turned to speak to her.

Presently she noticed Kertész sitting in his old place on the sofa, and talking in such a bright animated way to his neighbour that the plain old face was lit up with pleasure, and all the incipient pathos had vanished from it. He looked up after a few minutes, and met Uli's eyes fastened upon him with an expression of such complete love and understanding that a warm glow rushed to his heart. He was rewarded for the half-hour's boredom.

There was only one thing that rather disturbed them both. Dorry was not pleased. She was just as sweet to Uli as ever, and realized that it was absolutely useless to argue the matter; but she had never liked Dézso, and he knew it perfectly well. Uli had told him about Talmere, and he had guessed that Dorry was a partisan of his; but there was something more, he felt sure, an inherent dislike and fear on her part, that no amount of attentions from him seemed to melt in the least degree. In fact, Dorry was worried, and Uli knew it She tried everything she could to make her friend happy about her engagement; but Dorry, though she answered affectionately, was adamant. Uli thought at first that it all arose from those nights at Bá; but when one day

she stammered forth something to this effect, Dorry only smiled bitterly.

"Oh, my dear Uli," she answered coldly, "I am not going to set up as a moralist. I think it a mistake, of course; but you are the only judge as to how you were tempted—and you are going to marry him. I was upset at the time, naturally; but the man seems quite devoted to you. And—and—I suppose you think it was —is all right."

She changed the subject quickly. She hated talking about Kertész, and the deep-rooted loving sympathy she had always had for Uli seemed to fail her for the first time. She simply could not understand her friend's infatuation. One thing she insisted upon, and that was that Uli should write to Talmere at once and tell him. It was very difficult; but Uli saw the justice of it, and she wrote a short letter, just telling him the facts. She could not soften it for him, she knew that. She did not attempt to justify her treatment of him, she only added quite at the end: "I did not seek this, Ivor, I never expected it even, as you know. It just came and took possession of my life with a rush, and before I suspected it I was bound with strong chains. It is no good my saying I am sorry; you probably won't believe me, but what you suffer hurts me too. I am not naturally a cruel woman, you know that, don't you? You see I did not know. I think now I was like a child who thinks that the first great happiness it has is the acme of all joy, it is too young and inexperienced to guess that the world holds other joys fuller and

greater. Think of me as a child, Ivor, a child who hurts people unconsciously, who cannot realize how it hurts. You are too great-hearted to be revengeful I know, but one day I shall suffer too, I feel it in my soul. I have suffered of course, but not through my heart; but it will come, it is *bound* to come with a woman like myself; and then I shall look back and say, 'It is just, I made a man suffer for me'; and perhaps you may then have some pity for me in your heart, and know that I never meant to hurt you."

The tears were streaming down her face when she finished. It was the crumpled roseleaf in her happiness, that she should have to deal this deadly blow at a man whom she knew to be worthy of any woman's love.

That afternoon she was alone with her lover as usual in Mrs. Tihanyi's library. Her cousin nearly always contrived to be out at some time during the afternoon, and if she did not carry Dorry with her with some excuse, that young lady usually disappeared into her bedroom directly she heard Kertész's ring.

Dézso always said that it was a "convenient house in which to make love," the great baize door which shut out the kitchens squeaked loudly whenever any servant came through it, it had only taken to doing this lately, and one day when Mrs. Tihanyi said she must have it taken off its hinges and seen to, Dézso raised a laugh by anxiously pleading that it might be allowed to stay as it was for the present. The lovers always sat on the great English Chesterfield sofa in front of the open fireplace, and there Uli learnt many things about

Kertész. Over and over again was she surprised and fascinated by the curious contradictions in the man's character. He was a deep mystic, and yet he was intensely material too; he believed that life was divine, and yet had no fear of death for himself, nor scruples to take life from others. He had acknowledged quite calmly once, to Uli's almost casual question, that he had killed three men, and when Uli had sat up shuddering he had laughed at her, withal tenderly patting her hand. To her agitated interrogation, he had explained that two were duels while he was in the army, and the other—he had shrugged his shoulders.

"The other?" Uli breathed, her eyes dilating.

He shrugged again. "It was an impertinent coachman of mine—oh, don't look like that, Sweet; it was about ten years ago."

"But what did they do to you?" she asked, laying a trembling hand on his arm.

He laughed, captured her hand, and kissed it. "You dear, sweet, anxious thing!" he exclaimed lovingly; "one would think it was quite recent. They did nothing, my beautiful queen. The man had been disobedient and insulting, and then he—er—he, well, he tried to hit me, so of course I knocked him down, and the fool's head must needs strike a stone step; he always *was* a clumsy devil! So they brought in 'accidental death,' and found I hit him in self-defence. There you are, darling; now you have the whole story, so don't worry your sweet head any more about it."

And, during his subsequent love-making, she had

forgotten all things but his personality; but that night she had lain awake thinking for a long time, and shuddering now and then. At last she had comforted herself by thinking that he was now changed through his love for her. The only scene of violence she had seen had been outside the theatre that night, and that had been because he thought she had been hurt.

"I will make him see that it hurts me far more than any physical pain to see him violent to any one, then I am sure he will control his temper for my sake." And she had gone to sleep with a little smile on her lips.

This afternoon she was sitting close to her lover on the great sofa; his arm was round her, and he was telling her anecdotes of various people. He could be very entertaining and witty if he liked, and she was vastly amused and interested.

Presently he lifted her face and looked at it long and tenderly.

"You've been crying to-day, my angel," he said lovingly at the end of his scrutiny; "what is it?"

She gave a little rueful laugh, then sighed. "It was stupid of me to cry," she said with a smile at him, "but I hate hurting people, and I had to write a horrid letter." She had no idea either of denying her tears or the reason for them.

Dézso drew a little hissing breath through his teeth. "What letter, dearest?" he asked quietly.

Uli bent her head and kissed the hand lying on her shoulder.

"To Paris," she replied simply.

"To that man?" His arm tightened rather convulsively.

"Yes, dear; and I know it will hurt him horribly." Uli sighed again.

"Why should you write at all?" said Kertész, abruptly.

"Dézso!" Uli stared at him in blank surprise.

"Well, why should you?" Kertész persisted. "You've quite done with him; why should you write?"

Uli gasped. "My dear Dézso," she exclaimed, "surely you remember what I told you. He thought I was going to marry him. I was not engaged. I wouldn't be; I was not sure enough. But, until he heard differently, he would think I loved him."

"You *did* love him?"

Dézso's unoccupied hand was playing with the brass ring handle of a drawer in a large writing-table which was against the wall close to the sofa, and his fingers tightened on it till the knuckles were white.

"I thought I did!" said Uli, gravely. "Until I met you, darling, I thought it was the real thing."

Again she kissed his hand, and her voice was very tender.

"Did you kiss him?"

His voice was almost toneless as he asked the question; and Uli lifted her head to listen to it.

She blushed a little as she answered. "Yes, Dézso; you see, I thought I should marry him, though I would not promise."

"Did you kiss him often?" the toneless voice asked.

Uli gave a little restless movement in his encircling arm.

"Dézso!" she said reproachfully; "you're very naughty to cross-examine me so! Dear, it's all done with now. I have written and told him that I am going to marry you."

He seemed not to hear her. "Did you kiss him often?" he repeated in a lower tone.

Uli sat up quickly. "Dézso, I won't have it!" she exclaimed. "It's horrid of you! I hate to think of it all. It's over and done with; what's the good of reminding me of it?"

He was still holding the brass handle, and he turned and looked at it with unseeing eyes.

"Perhaps," he said very quietly, "perhaps you were everything to him, as you were to me up at Bá!"

"Dézso!" she bent to try and see into his eyes, but she could only see the lowered lids and long black lashes.

"What was his name?" Kertész went on in the same voice.

"Dézso! what's the matter with you? Are you *jealous?* Jealous of the past; how stupid!"

"What is his name?" Kertész repeated.

Uli clasped her hands tight on her knees, her temper was rising rapidly.

"I shall not tell you!" she answered quietly. "It

is not fair to men to give their names when they love a woman hopelessly. I never would give a man away."

"You won't tell me his name. You're afraid I——"

Uli interrupted him. "I'm afraid of *nothing!*" she said hotly. "I never was afraid of anything, and I never shall be——"

Just then he turned and looked at her, and she shrank back to her side of the sofa, his eyes shone with a red light on the iris, and he did not seem to see anything.

"You refuse to tell me his name?" His voice was so low it was almost a whisper.

"Dézso, don't look like that! For God's sake, don't look like that!" she shrank further away from him.

Suddenly there was a snap and rending tear of wood, and the brass handle came away from the drawer in Kertesz's tense fingers.

Just at that moment there came the squeak of the baize door leading to the kitchens, and the footman entered the room a moment after with a note for Uli; then, while she was opening it, he bent and brushed up the fireplace.

Uli turned to Kertész. "Will you tell him to ask Dorry to come here?" she said, without looking at him; "it's an invitation from the Frigyes, and Dorry always writes down our engagements, so I want to know if we're free, they say their messenger is waiting."

Kertész spoke to the man, who went out. The two

did not speak a word till Dorry entered the room. She gave a quick glance at Kertész's face, and lifted her eyebrows quickly. She noticed the broken handle of the drawer, and then she looked at Uli; but Uli was reading the note again, and did not notice her glances.

Chapter XXI

THE next morning Uli received a letter from Dézso containing an abject apology. He said—

"I don't know what seized hold of me; I felt mad for the moment. Beloved, it was only maddening jealousy, to think that any other man had held you in his arms and kissed that sweet mouth. I had been worried over things all day, and I suppose my nerves were in a state of irritation. I am more than sorry. Will you forgive your humble slave? He asks for forgiveness on his knees.

"You have given me the greatest proof of loving that any woman can give, and I was a fool to behave as I did. I know the other thing was only a passing fancy of your inexperience, and you were perfectly right to write to him. In fact you are right in all things, and I trust you absolutely. Forgive me, my sweet, forgive me. I have not slept all night for thinking of what a brute I was. I do love you, Uli; for my great love's sake forgive me the things I said."

Uli kissed the letter and hid it in her breast, and her face that had been troubled since the afternoon before, cleared as she wrote him four words in answer—

"Come! I love you."

The next few days passed in such perfect bliss that

every hour Uli spent with her lover passed like exquisite moments. The days seemed to speed away in a fleet dream of happiness. Kertész surpassed himself in tender attentions; he seemed to think of some new thing to please his Love every day. He piled costly presents upon her. Her room was a bower of flowers. There was not one thing that he had ever heard her express a wish for that he did not contrive somehow to get for her. He pleased her more than she could express by telling her one day that he had paid the fare of the poor widow at Bá, whom she had befriended, to her own people in a distant province, and had given her a small weekly allowance; also he had told the doctor at Bá to let him know whenever there were any cases of distress that he could help.

Uli lived in a perfect delirium of happiness. Mrs. Tihanyi was most kind to them, and Kertész was at the house nearly all day, except when his parliamentary duties prevented him, and even those he neglected when it was possible.

A few days after Uli had written to Talmere she was sitting in the afternoon before the fire in the library, waiting for Dézso, when the footman brought her in two letters. One was from Jane Colwyn and the other from Talmere. She looked at the latter rather sadly for a few minutes, then she opened it. It was so like him. No blame for her; only an overwhelming sadness at his own fate. It was very short. No laboured self-commiseration; just a few lines of sad farewell. He ended abruptly—

"Do you know that ever since your letter came yesterday (I could not write at once) these lines have been persistently running in my head—

> "Oh heart of mine, marked broad with her mark,
> *Tekel*, found wanting, set aside!"

"And so they go on round and round in that ridiculous thing called my brain, and I try to think coherently and I cannot. I call on my brain for sustained effort, and my brain answers: '*Tekel*, found wanting—set aside.'"

The salt tears were blinding Uli, and she did not hear the bell; she started as the door opened, and Kertész came in carrying a huge bunch of roses. She folded the letter quietly as she came forward, and slipped it into a pocket in her petticoat. Kertész put the flowers on a table.

"Oh, how gorgeous!" exclaimed Uli, as she lifted her arms to put round his neck. "I have never had so many flowers as I have now; you are—why, what's the matter, darling?" for Kertész had held her arms before they could clasp themselves round him, and was staring at her.

"From whom was that letter?" he asked abruptly.

A little worried wrinkle came in Uli's brow, then it cleared quickly as she remembered Dézso's letter of a few days back; she put out her hand again and touched his.

"It is in answer to mine," she answered, smiling at him; "from Paris, you know. Don't let us talk about

it, Dézso; it's very sad, and I hate making people sad."

"Except me," said Dézso, with a short laugh; "you don't mind making me sad!"

"You!" ejaculated Uli, her eyes widening. "When do I make you sad?"

"Now; you cry continually over another man. If you want him, go to him! I expect he's more satisfactory than I am."

They were still standing opposite one another, and Uli's eyes looked into his furious ones with a wondering stare. Then she said very quietly—

"Dézso, don't you remember the other day, and the letter you wrote me? I thought it would never occur again." Then, as he did not answer, but still stared sullenly at her, she caught her breath in a little sob. "Dézso, I wrote to him to tell him I was yours, and he has written back a very sad letter accepting his dismissal. Now it is all done with. That is the last of him. He has passed out of my life, and I have left him very sad. I think his devotion to me was worth one salt tear."

Kertész put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes with a less severe gaze. Then he said quietly—

"Let me read the letter, Uli."

"What?" exclaimed Uli. "His?"

"Yes, of course—his. Let me read it."

Uli pulled herself away from his hands, and drew herself up.

"Do you think, because I am a woman, that I am necessarily dishonourable?" she asked proudly.

The red light she dreaded came into Kertész's eyes. "You're afraid to show it to me," he said in an intense voice.

"I'm not afraid!" cried Uli, indignantly; "there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Then show it to me."

"I absolutely refuse."

Uli turned her shoulder on him. She was feeling really angry now; she had trusted him and believed in him, and this was the result. She was glad the letter was in her pocket, or, she felt sure, that in his present mad mood Dézso would have snatched and read it; and though it had no name, it had Talmere's address, and she felt afraid of what Kertész might do. Besides, the idea of letting one man—the successful one—see the heart-broken outpourings of another—the rejected—was hateful to her.

Kertész remained quite still for a few moments, then he said quietly but in a terrifying voice—

"I ask you to show me that letter."

Uli drummed on the table with her fingers, and did not answer.

"If you don't show me that letter, you will never see me again."

Uli shrugged slightly; she did not believe his threat, and she was too angry at his injustice to mind the voice with which he said it.

"Do you hear me, Uli?"

"Yes, I hear," answered Uli, shortly.

Suddenly his voice, low hitherto, rang out loudly. "I command you to give me that letter!"

Uli turned on him and blazed. "Command!" she scoffed. "How dare you speak to me like that?"

He pressed his lips together till they were white. Then he held out his hand.

"Uli, give me that letter."

"I re——" Uli began; then she noticed his face, and her anger vanished to give place to sheer physical fright. "Dézso," she reasoned gently, "can't you see, dear, that it would be hateful of me? When you are sane again you will see that I am right. I can't do it, Dézso. Do be kind to me again." She ended pitifully; but it is doubtful if the man heard her.

He still held out his hand, and she saw that it was trembling, or rather *beating* would describe it better, as if the throbs of his heart had communicated themselves to those long nervous fingers.

"Give it me! give it me!" he hissed; then he bent as though he would take it from her by force.

She clasped her hands over the pocket and stared at him fascinated with horror. He tried to get her hands away for one moment; then he stood upright again.

"Once more, will you give it?"

Uli was trembling from head to foot; she could not speak, but she shook her head.

For the space of a breath he seemed to try to pull himself together; then his arm shot out from the shoulder. She saw it, and instinctively started to one

side, and the doubled fist came down with all its force on her shoulder, and she crashed to the ground; a small table went with her, and the world rushed down in blackness.

Kertész fled from the room, rushed through the hall, and out of the hall door. On the steps he nearly knocked down Mrs. Tihanyi and Dorry, who were just returning from a drive. He took no notice of them, and tore past them down to the gate. He was hatless and coatless, and for one moment the two women stared after him; then, with horror, their eyes met.

"Uli!" shrieked Dorry, and flew into the house, with her hostess running after her. Dorry burst into the library; then she turned fiercely to Mrs. Tihanyi. Through her open, gasping mouth the horrified, jabbering words came. "He's killed her! I knew he would." Then she flung herself down on the floor amongst the *débris* of broken table, glass and china ornaments, and took Uli's head in her arms. A stream of blood flowed over the ermine furs she was wearing, and an agonized sob broke from her.

Mrs. Tihanyi was sending a long, continuous peal of the electric bell vibrating through the house, and in a moment the footman came running.

"Call the maids here!" his mistress screamed before he was at the door, "and run, run as you have never run before, for a doctor. Put one of your master's coats on from the hall. Quick!"

The man cast one horrified glance at the form on the floor, and ran, calling out, as he went, to the maids.

The baize door squeaked, and two frightened women appeared.

"One of you stay here," commanded Mrs. Tihanyi. "You, Elá, go for my sponge, and hot water in a basin, and towels."

Dorry was feeling Uli's heart. "She is dead!" she said quietly. She was dry-eyed and white to the lips.

Mrs. Tihanyi was not a young woman, but now her energy and strength were stupendous.

"Move her round from all that broken stuff," she said quickly. "She's too heavy for us to carry altogether; just move her head and shoulders, so."

Then she clutched a pile of satin cushions from the sofa, and placed the poor unconscious body and head on them.

"Now, Dorry, we must undo her stays. No, I won't believe she is dead; it's too horrible. O God, this blood!"

Just then Elá entered with the water and towels and sponge; and while Dorry and the other maid were loosening the clothes, Mrs. Tihanyi and Elá proceeded to bathe the streaming head.

"Scissors, quick," the older woman said; and when they were given her, she cut away the hair on the right side of the head on top, about two inches above the temple. She disclosed a nasty, deep jagged cut, which was bleeding profusely; she kept the hot sponge on it, and poured water continually, to keep it hot. The cushions and carpet were soaked with blood and water. She had flung her furs from her, but the dress she was

wearing was splotched and sopped with blood. She never looked up or noticed anything but the beautiful head under her hands.

Dorry's head, from which she had torn the hat, was resting on Uli's white breast. Then a short, dry sob broke from her.

"I can't hear her heart at all," she whispered.

Mrs. Tihanyi bit her lips. "Is that the doctor? Run and see," she said quickly to the maid.

It was the doctor, and he entered the room the next minute with a bag in his hand. He was a grave, middle-aged man, inspiring confidence by his manner. He gave a quick glance round, then he knelt on the ground and took out his stethoscope and fixed it in position, then listened. Dorry's and Mrs. Tihanyi's eyes were fastened on his face with a terrible fear. But he raised his head in a moment, and said something in Hungarian. Dorry's eyes went quickly to her hostess.

"It's beating," the latter said quickly, "she's alive!"

Then the doctor looked at the head. "Yes, a nasty cut," he said gravely; "I shall sew up this before I restore her to consciousness. Do you mind holding her head?"

"I mind nothing as long as she is alive," sighed Mrs. Tihanyi.

"This cut, a little lower down, would have been fatal," said the doctor, as he prepared his needle. "Now, please take down her hair and plait it behind. I see you've cut some of it, quite right; I must shave that bit."

When the cut was cleansed and sewn up, and the head bandaged, the man lifted her by the shoulders slightly, to put her higher on the pillows. Then he gave an exclamation. He laid her gently back, and ran his fingers over Uli's left shoulder.

"Aië! I must ask you to cut off this blouse!" he said quickly.

Mrs. Tihanyi's scissors went snip-snip along the sleeve and shoulder seams, and when the dismembered blouse fell away from the shoulder, they all exclaimed; the shoulder and neck for a large area was a black, swollen mass. The doctor cut away the straps of *lingerie* over the shoulder, and ran his fingers down it. "A broken collar-bone," he announced succinctly.

He went to his bag again, and rolls and rolls of bandages were placed on the floor by his side. He put on, first, some dressing for the bruise, then proceeded to bandage the arm and shoulder.

Then he ran his hands down over the beautiful limbs, feeling carefully, tenderly, each bone.

"Nothing else broken, as far as I can see at present. Now, will you allow me to help to carry her to bed, then you can undress her and make her comfortable; after that I will give her something to bring her to. It won't hurt her, a little unconsciousness; it has saved her pain. She has had a marvellous escape. A little lower down, and that cut would have been fatal; also the shoulder—a little lower down, that—er—blow would have been on the heart, and killed her."

The footman, who was hovering outside the closed

door, with the cook, helped to carry the inanimate form to the bedroom; and there Dorry, Mrs. Tihanyi, and Elá undressed it, cutting everything they could not get off. They put on a loose nightgown, minus the left sleeve, and called the doctor again.

Chapter XXII

THE doctor ministered to Uli for over half an hour before a faint sigh and a trembling of the mouth gave first signs of returning consciousness. Dorry was holding her hand. She had taken off her blood-stained furs, and Mrs. Tihanyi had hurried into her own room and changed her dress in an incredibly short time, and now both the women waited anxiously, and watched the terribly white face and bandaged head with strained attention.

Again there came that short sigh, and the head was turning restlessly on the pillow; then, before she opened her eyes, she said, in a very faint voice—

"Oh, my head is aching so!"

The doctor and Mrs. Tihanyi looked at Dorry, as the words were in English; and Dorry bent over her friend.

"Yes, darling, I know," she said tenderly. "Will you drink this?" And she put a glass the doctor handed her to Uli's lips, while the doctor slipped his arm under her head and lifted it slightly.

Uli obediently drank, and opened her eyes and fixed them first on Dorry, then on her cousin. Then she saw the doctor and looked puzzled. The next moment she shut her eyes again wearily, and put up her right hand to her head; there she encountered the bandages, and opened her eyes again quickly.

"What's this?" she asked, looking at Dorry. Dorry had been dreading the question.

"It's all right, Uli dear; you hurt your head, and we bound it up for you."

"Oh, how funny!" said Uli, faintly; then she tried to put up both her hands, and gave a little cry of pain. "My shoulder hurts," she said pitifully.

"Yes, dear; you must not try to move your left arm. It will be all right soon."

Uli shut her eyes again, and a little worried frown was on her face. The three watching saw the eyebrows moving as the poor brain tried to piece things together.

Suddenly her eyes opened wide and black as night, and they all started at the appalling look of fear in them. She tried to sit up, but fell back on the pillow, the white lips opened, and a sound came from them that made her listeners shudder, such a sound that one on the rack might have given when too weak to scream. Dorry gave a little gasping sob, and put her arms right across her friend; but Uli's weak hand flapped at her, and Uli's distended eyes were fixed on the door.

"Dézso!" she cried, in a hoarse voice. "Don't let him in!" She spoke in French now, and her voice expressed all the horror of the damned. "He's there, waiting to kill me! Don't let him in! Olga, keep him out, keep him out!" Her voice was a hoarse scream now, and she beat with her white hand on the bedclothes.

The doctor turned to Mrs. Tihanyi. "You must do

something to quiet her," he said in Hungarian; "the opiate can have no effect while she's suffering from this terror."

Mrs. Tihanyi turned to her cousin. "Uli," she said quietly, "look at me. Now, I promise you Dézso shall not enter the house; I will go out now and see to it. Do you hear?"

But Uli was beyond reasoning, and still the horrified eyes gazed at the door and the pitiful hand beat at the clothes.

Mrs. Tihanyi went out quickly. In the passage she met her husband, who had just come in and gone straight to the library, where his eyes had encountered the terrifying sight of blood and broken ornaments. His wife put her finger to her lips with a glance over her shoulder at the door behind her.

"What is it?" he gasped.

"Hush!" and she drew him with her out of the passage. Then she put her poor head on his shoulder and sobbed. "Oh, my God!" she moaned, "it's awful. Have you seen the library?"

Mr. Tihanyi nodded.

"Dézso nearly killed her," she went on quickly; "she has only just regained consciousness. Her head's cut open and her collar-bone is broken. The doctor says that it was the narrowest escape imaginable. She is very ill."

"What was the reason?"

"We don't know. Reason! Just as if a madman like that has reason! We just came in and found her."

And she recounted quickly how Kertész had fled past them and what had happened after.

Mr. Tihanyi frowned deeply. "I shall go to the police," he said quickly.

But his wife clutched his arm. "Not yet, Károly—not yet; she is too ill for any one to see her; but we must keep him out. She's terrified, and the doctor is nervous about her. You must go and give instructions to the servants. Tell them to look at every one at the tradesmen's door through the window before they open. Then you must give Karl your revolver, and he must have it in his hand when he goes to the front door; and if Dézso comes, tell him to cover him with it at once, and say he will shoot unless he goes immediately. Send round one of the maids with Dészo's coat and hat; tell her not to speak a word to his man, just leave them. Now, see to this, Károly, quickly; I must go back. Oh, and tell the maids to shut up the library; we can use the little room. Also tell them that when Henriette comes in they must not frighten her, but keep her in the kitchen and come for you to explain matters to her. She is out for a walk with the Kátzers' maid. Try and calm her. I must go back."

She turned and went back softly to Uli's room, but as she opened the door Uli gave a quick, harsh scream and cowered back.

Her cousin came and bent over her. "It's only I, dear," she said gently. "Now, Uli, you must listen to me, or you will be ill. Dézso cannot get into this house; Károly is seeing to that. Do you understand?"

"My letter!" cried Uli; "is it there?"

"What letter, dear?" asked Dorry, in English.

"In my petticoat," gasped the harsh voice—"Ivor's answer to me. He wanted me to give it him. Is it there—is it there?"

Dorry went to the heap of blood-stained garments that had been kicked to one side, and pulled out the silk petticoat; she felt in the pocket and found the letter.

"It's all right, Uli; here it is."

"Keep it, Dorry," said Uli, faintly. "No, don't burn it; keep it always on you. He said, he said——" The piteous voice ceased for a moment; then, as it went on, the tone changed and became hurried and broken. "No, Dézso, I cannot give it to you. Are you mad? Dézso, Dézso, no, no, no—oh! don't look like that, you frighten me. Oh, you killed the poor man. He was always a clumsy devil, and his head hit on a stone. I am not clumsy, Dézso. Oh, don't look like that; your eyes are red, Dézso—red, red, red."

The doctor understood some French, and he looked very grave.

"I must have another opinion," he said quickly; then he sat down and wrote a letter rapidly. "Will you send some one with this at once?"

Mrs. Tihanyi went out of the room, followed by the hurried, incoherent phrases of her cousin. All the servants were collected in the passage outside the baize door, Karl clutching a revolver and looking very fierce.

"She's very ill," answered Mrs. Tihanyi to a question put by one of them. "One of you must run with this at once; the doctor wants another opinion. She's delirious. Watch the doors well, all of you. If Mr. Kertész gets in you will be responsible for her life."

She ran back to the room. Just outside she met her husband with two glasses in his hand.

"Here, Olga, drink this at once," he said kindly; "you're as white as a sheet. That's right; now take this other glass to Miss Dorry and make her drink it. She's delirious, isn't she?" he added, listening to the babbling words which came through the door.

"Yes. We've sent for another doctor," his wife answered, as she disappeared inside the room with the glass of brandy.

Dorry, white and frightened, was standing by the bed.

"Drink this," said Mrs. Tihanyi, presenting the glass. "Károly sent it; he made me drink one too."

Dorry took it absent-mindedly and drank it off. A faint colour crept back to her lips.

"He can't get in, can he?" she asked anxiously. "It would kill her."

Mrs. Tihanyi calmed her fears, and they sat down and waited for the other doctor, listening with set faces to the agonized voice from the bed, which went on unceasingly, sometimes in English, but nearly always in French, as she went over and over again the terrifying scene in the library.

In a little while the door opened very gently, and

Henriette came in. She had got over her hysterics in the kitchen, but the poor soul was still white with terror and distress; and as she saw the pitiful head, restlessly turning on the bed, she covered her mouth with her hand to stifle the sob that broke from her.

Dorry roused herself and came to the door. She patted the maid's shoulder kindly.

"We must all do what we can, Henriette, to save her," she said with trembling lips. "With so many people who love her, she ought to be pulled through."

Henriette nodded. "Don't let Mademoiselle fear me; I shall not break down, I promise. She's in a fever now?"

"Yes," answered Dorry, shuddering; "that's the serious part. We're waiting for the other doctor; he's a great man, and this doctor says he has hopes that he may be able to advise something. Do you mind blood, Henriette? Because, if not, you'd better clear up those clothes. You will have to throw away most of them, they're cut to pieces; we had to cut them to get them off. You see, a bone is broken in her shoulder, so we could not lift the arm." She went back to her post by the bed, and Henriette began quietly to sort the blood-stained bundle on the floor.

"The petticoat is all right," she said to herself, "and they may be able to clean the skirt; it's not much stained. I can mend the *cache-corset;* the chemise must have a new top on. But the blouse is done for, and Madame put it on new to-day to please that—that *devil!* The poor, pretty blouse!" She

looked tenderly at the exquisite silk and embroidery in her hand, all stained with blood and cut by the relentless scissors; then she rolled it up in a bundle with a deep sigh. She hung the petticoat and skirt up in the wardrobe, put the *lingerie* in the linen-basket with the blouse on top of them to get rid of it for the moment, then she looked out of the window. "Here is the doctor," she whispered; and the two women breathed, "Thank God!"

The great specialist entered the room in a few minutes, bowed to the ladies, shook hands with his colleague, and proceeded to feel Uli's pulse.

Then he turned to Mrs. Tihanyi. "Dr. Dietzl merely told me that this lady had had a blow and the results," he said quietly; "I must ask you to tell me all you know about it. I can do nothing unless I know the state of mind of the patient; it would be working in the dark."

Mrs. Tihanyi flushed painfully. "It is very distressing to me," she said, with a shudder; "but, of course, you must know. We do not know all ourselves. You know Dézso Kertész?" He nodded. "Well, this is the lady to whom he was engaged—Lady Branton. He is a very violent-tempered man; but we thought he had improved." She hesitated.

"Yes," said the doctor, quietly; "I remember the case of the coachman some years ago—well?"

"Well"—Mrs. Tihanyi went on, with her hands fidgeting with a piece of lace on her dress—"well, they were alone to-day in the library, and apparently

he wanted to take a letter from her that she had received. We know this from her anxiety about the letter in her pocket when she first came to. We know nothing more except from her ravings; he evidently hit her on the shoulder, and she fell on a small table loaded with glass and china, and the whole thing broke with her. There was a piece of glass in her head. Do you understand French? Well, listen!"

The voice had been rambling on all the time without ceasing, and now the doctor turned to the bed and listened.

"Don't let him in, Olga—for God's sake, don't let him in! He wants to kill me. Don't you see his eyes are red? Dézso—Dézso, don't look like that! I can't, Dézso—I can't, *chéri;* it would not be honourable. He's nothing to me, Dézso. I tell you I love you only; but I can't show another man's letter. It would not be fair. It's such a heart-broken letter, Dézso. And you are the successful man. It's dishonourable. No, no, no!" There was a short pause, then the feverish eyes turned restlessly to the door. "Don't let him in, Dorry! Oh, keep him out!" she almost screamed.

The doctor shook his head gravely. "Something must be done to calm her."

Mrs. Tihanyi told him of the precautions she had taken. Just as she was speaking they were all startled by a noise from the hall, some piece of furniture was thrown down, and there were loud voices in altercation. Dorry clutched her hostess's arm.

"It's he!" she exclaimed.

"Keep him away—keep him out!" went on the voice from the bed.

The doctor went towards the door. "I will go and speak to him," he said quickly, and went out.

The three women and Dr. Dietzl looked anxiously at each other and waited. The time seemed interminable, and then the doctor came back.

"The man is mad," he said shortly. "I've told him that her life depends on being kept quiet, and at last he went, promising me faithfully not to return. I found your man holding a revolver at his head, and your husband guarding the passage with another." He smiled grimly, then he bent over the bed. "Lady Branton, I want you to listen to me," he said, very quietly in fair French. The incoherent babbling ceased for a moment, and he went on, "I have just seen Dézso Kertész, do you understand?" A long shudder went over Uli's whole body. "I am telling you the truth, I swear it. He has gone a long way away, and will not return to the house. Do you understand? He will not come back here, Dézso Kertész has gone." He fixed his eyes on Uli's, and gradually a little sense seemed to creep back to the poor racked brain.

"Yes," she whispered; "my head aches so."

"I will give you something to make it better." He whispered something to Dr. Dietzl, who mixed a dose in a glass. "Now, Madame, take this, and it will make your head better." Then, as Uli drank it, he went on gently, "You must remain quite quiet for a few minutes, or it will not take effect, you must not think or talk;

remember what I have told you. We are all here, and you have nothing to fear. The door is locked, and your friends are all here." He went on in a very low voice, repeating the same words over and over again, and holding her hand firmly in his. The strong opiate at last took effect, the tired eyes closed, the restless fingers ceased to twitch, and in a few minutes she slept.

"Oh, thank God!" breathed Mrs. Tihanyi, as at last the regular breathing proclaimed the rest they had prayed for.

The doctor turned to the lesser luminary. "Are you sure there is no pressure on the brain? I did not dare examine the head?"

"Quite sure. I looked before I sewed up the cut, and I felt all round the head in case there was another knock;" and he proceeded to give technical details of the cut and the shoulder.

His superior nodded, satisfied. "I will look in in a few hours. You have the telephone here? That's right; 'phone to me if there is anything wrong, but she ought to sleep well into the night. Now, I wonder if we can find a nurse who speaks French," he added musingly.

"Oh no!" whispered Mrs. Tihanyi. "We can nurse her, and Miss Dorry here has passed examinations of the ambulance, she tells me. We are all devoted to her. If you find we do not do well, then you can have a nurse, but *do* try us."

The man smiled at her earnestness and acquiesced.

"Send for some ice, and if she shows any sign of

returning delirium put an ice-bag on. Impress her mind with the fact that that man cannot return. All the same, let a good guard be kept over the door, as I do not trust him; he's now mad with remorse, and may do anything to try and see her. I will get a detective on my way home, a man I know, who won't talk. I will tell him to watch in the street. We must avoid any accident, it's imperative. *Au revoir, mesdames,* mind you telephone for me if I am wanted."

He went, having inspired confidence all round. Shortly afterwards Dr. Dietzl went too, promising to return in two hours, and the women were left to there patient nursing and anxiety.

Chapter XXIII

THE next three days were indeed an anxious time for the whole household. Occasionally Uli would lie quietly, obediently taking whatever was offered her; her temperature would be nearly normal, and her manner gentle. Then the temperature, for no apparent reason, would suddenly mount, a perfect passion of fear would seize her, and it would require the united efforts of Mrs. Tihanyi and Dorry to soothe the poor brain and bring anything like peace to the restless body. But at last the fever attacks got more and more infrequent, and the fourth day was passed in a delightful calm, which made the three willing nurses look almost happy again. Henriette's round face lost its unnatural look of despair, and she positively smiled when Dr. Dietzl said that he thought all was now well.

But the next fortnight was very trying to all concerned. Uli's hurts healed quickly, as she was naturally a healthy woman, but she could not quite disguise the fear in her eyes, and her nurses knew that any moment, through some accident, they might have to face the ordeal of a *rencontre* with Kertész.

He had haunted the house, and spoken to every one he could see, but he did not get much consideration from any one. From Mr. Tihanyi and the doctors, down

to the kitchen maid, all treated him with coldness and answered his inquiries curtly.

It was in vain that he implored the doctors to allow him to see Uli; they were adamant. He wrote; but his letters were put on one side and not given to her. He tried to force his way into the house; but it was too well guarded. The detective that was stationed outside warned him that unless he desisted from annoyance he would have to take him into custody. He gnashed his teeth with rage; but he was impotent, and he just waited as quietly as he could, with a fixed determination to see Uli when she was well.

As for Uli, after the first three days of intermittent fever, she did not mention Dézso's name for a long time. Dorry used to watch her with an aching heart as she lay quite quietly staring straight in front of her with a world of woe in her eyes. One afternoon, when she had lain like this for some time, she suddenly turned her head and looked at Dorry. She smiled a wan little smile as she met her friend's eyes.

"Well, Dorry," she said faintly, "I've made a horrid mess of my life, haven't I?"

Dorry stroked her hand gently. "Dear, it's not your fault," she said tenderly.

Uli sighed; she remained silent for a short time. When she spoke again her voice was very bitter.

"I can't forgive, Dorry."

"I should think not!" said Dorry, indignantly.

Uli put up her hand to her head. "It's not this" —touching the bandages; "I just can't forgive, that's

all. It's odd, because I'm not unforgiving by nature; but—well, you see, I loved another man; the man I loved died in those few minutes in the library, and my love died with him. It was not so much the violence—he was mad—as his not trusting me; I couldn't marry a man who did not trust me. He said—he said things a few days before which were awful; but I forgave him, as he swore it would never occur again. But"—the faint voice broke off, then she went on quickly—"I suppose he would have killed me if I'd married him."

Dorry nodded.

"Ah, Dorry, you never liked him, and you were right, though he has lots to love in him;" she spoke musingly, then she rubbed her eyes impatiently. "He half hypnotized me, I think, Dorry. I could not call my soul my own. Don't fear, dear, it has all gone now. I can't help it; he just killed it. He could not move me one iota now. Dorry, we must get away from here."

"Yes, Uli dear, as soon as you're well we'll go."

"When do the doctors say I shall be well enough to move?"

"They won't say; it all depends on you. If you keep quite quiet, and eat well, and are good, it will be much quicker."

Uli thought a little. "Listen, Dorry," she said impressively, "you must tell Olga and the doctors and every one to say to—to Dézso that I shall not be able to get up for ages. Even after I am well, they must still say that, do you see? Then, when I can move, we will slip off one night and go to England. Let's see; the

flat will be empty in a week; you must write to Simpson and tell her to arrange everything."

"Suppose Mr. Kertész follows?" said Dorry, without thinking.

Uli started and frowned. She thought deeply for a few minutes; then she said firmly—

"He must not know where we have gone. Olga shall give out that we've gone to America to your home for a visit. He does not know the address of the flat, though of course he could easily find out. Olga must say we started from Hâvre, by one of the French boats. We will go just in time to catch one of these, and he will not know we've gone till the next day, or even after, if we have any luck. Then, as he can't follow, he'll have time to think, and will probably settle down at last, and forget."

Dorry sighed. She had her own ideas about Kertész forgetting, but she said nothing, and agreed to the plan Uli had suggested, and thought of other small details herself to help the general arrangement. She wrote to a friend in America, asking her to cable the words, "Will meet boat, delighted see you both," so that this could be shown to Kertész, and a *vraisemblance* would be given to the tale, and he might be thrown entirely off the scent. She felt very anxious about the whole thing, and her heart throbbed heavily when she thought of the possibility of Kertész following them. It was not so much that she feared Uli succumbing to his fascinating personality again—that chance she fully believed was over; but she feared his violence. She knew the

man was mad with love for her friend. She fully did him justice there; she felt that he had given Uli the greatest love it was possible for him to give. True, it was a sensual, violent love; but the man was a sensualist, and very much a savage, and she quite realized that it was the best he had to give. The curious half-hypnotic power he had wielded over her friend had never affected her in the least, and not speaking French perfectly, she had missed a good deal of the *finesse* of his really brilliant conversation. During the weeks that Uli had been engaged, the fear had been heavy upon her that some horror would come from it; it probably was nothing uncanny at all, but arose from her instinctive dislike for, and mistrust of, Kertész.

Now she worked as hard as she could to deceive him after they would have gone; she took Henriette into her confidence, and the Frenchwoman, who had always been her mistress's willing slave, entered thoroughly into the spirit of the thing, and told the two French maids she knew in Budapest that her lady was going to America with her friend when they left Hungary.

Mr. and Mrs. Tihanyi thoroughly agreed to the necessity of deceiving Kertész, and to avoid all accidents they told all their friends that their guests were going to America. Kertész heard the rumour in time, and wrote letter after letter to Mrs. Tihanyi imploring her to intercede for him. Mrs. Tihanyi answered one letter, and told him coldly that it would be time enough to talk of speaking to Uli when she was well enough

to move, which would not be for weeks yet. This was only a week before they were to leave, but Uli's plan of keeping up the fiction that she was too ill to move was adopted by all of them, which gave them time to make all arrangements in peace.

Uli recovered wonderfully quickly, and though she felt very weak and ill, she was anxious to leave the city, where she had been so happy, as soon as she possibly could. The weeks she had spent in bed had given her plenty of time to think, and her heart felt very sore, and her spirit broken. A curious feeling had taken possession of her; she felt as if she had loved Kertész in another life, and only the dim half-recollection was left of it now; as she had said to Dorry, it was not the man's violence that had killed her love, it was his want of trust. She had poured out the wealth of her heart at his feet, and he had seemed to take it up and examine it critically, in a cavilling spirit of mistrust; instead of accepting it on his knees, with deep thankfulness to his Creator for such a wondrous gift. As far as she could tell, she had most truly loved the man. The hot blood in her veins might have swayed her to a great extent, she had been carried off her feet by his fierce primitive passion; but she knew quite well that she had had a very deep and tender love as well. She had many times felt the maternal, protective love for him, that all the best women feel for the man they truly love. And now she worried herself as to why this had so entirely vanished. She only had an overwhelming horror of the man left; she knew that, even if she saw him, his

power over her would have entirely departed. She cried a little, when she was alone, over what she was pleased to call her changeableness; but the fact was, that the extraordinary high-strung sensitiveness of her nature had had such a shock, that it was as if a sponge had wiped away on a slate all marks made by his personality, and there was no possibility of him being able to write his name across her heart again. As she had said, she was naturally a forgiving woman, and as a matter of fact, she forgave him the injury he had done to her body, but she could not forgive the injury he had done to her heart; and that poor heart felt dead for the time being.

Strange to say, she had no wild regret for all she had given him; that had been to the man she had loved, and she knew she could have had no regret if that man had lived. He was dead, and she looked back on what he had been to her with a sad longing, as women may look back on the joy of the past with some dear dead lover, knowing that it can never be again, and that only memory is left.

When she was allowed to get up, she went about her room with feeble steps, packing up the things her lover had given her, which were to be sent to him with a letter, after she had left. Looking with sad eyes at the gifts that reminded her of the past, she felt as if, indeed, a grave had closed over it, and she looked forward to her life with a curious, blank, empty feeling. What had it to offer her? Nothing. She must pick up the tangled ends somehow, she supposed, and sort them, but she had no hope of finding any joy amongst the *débris*.

With great secrecy they made arrangements for their departure, and one cold afternoon, at the beginning of the year, they started for Paris, where they were to stay one night, *en route.* Mr. Tihanyi had done everything he could think of for their comfort on the journey; they had a reserved carriage, and the conductor had dozens of instructions as to the attentions he was to pay to the invalid. Mrs. Tihanyi cried softly at the station, and hugged her cousin in her arms. She repeated over and over again, that "the whole thing was her fault, she ought to have known;" and all Uli's loving contradictions could not comfort her. She promised to come over to England for a long visit, later, in the spring; and as a parting present, she gave Uli a beautiful old ring that had belonged to her grandmother, a ring Uli knew she prized more than any other bauble she possessed.

At Paris they were met by Telbesco, who was wild with delight at seeing his *amorata* again. Dorry had asked Uli if she minded his meeting them; and Uli had answered "No." But she gave Dorry to understand that Talmere was not to come too. Telbesco never mentioned his friend; although he was light-hearted as a child, he had an infinite amount of tact; and to-night he busied himself with Henriette over the luggage, got Uli and Dorry some hot soup, tucked them and himself into an omnibus, and drove to the hotel with them, chattering the whole time of the journey, the weather, and indifferent matters. He had been to their hotel and engaged their rooms for them, and had sent round piles of lovely flowers. It was very

late, and Uli was dead tired; Dorry put her to bed herself, and waited till she had fallen asleep, which she did almost at once, like a weary child.

They did not dare stay longer in Paris for fear of Kertész, so they went off to England by the afternoon train.

Simpson opened the door of the flat to them with a beaming face; but she looked serious when she saw how ill her mistress looked, and she hurried her into her warm bedroom with a proprietary air that made Henriette look sulky. Uli sank into an armchair; she was exhausted, but a pleased smile passed over her face as she looked round at her familiar room.

"It's good to be home again, Simpson," she sighed.

When the boxes had been brought in and Simpson had gone to get some soup, there was a little sound at the door, and it was pushed gently open. A serious black face with glowing eyes appeared, then Aristotle marched in. He stood with one paw lifted, looking wonderingly at Uli.

"Arry, my lamb!" cried Uli, holding out her hand; and with a "curr-r-r" and bound he was across the room and in her lap. His purr mixed itself up with his "talk," as Uli called it, until he was positively incoherent; he rolled, and he got up again; he raised himself until he could gently bite his mistress's chin; he carded up her dress in great bunches, and generally did everything he knew to show his ecstasy.

Dorry laughed as she knelt on the ground and rubbed him, and received the few caresses he could spare from his lady.

"And you feared he might have forgotten you!" she said reproachfully. "Oh, Arry, you are cunning!"

Arry superintended Uli's meal, and the whole process of going to bed; and when his mistress was ensconced in her big bed, he sprang up and retired into a corner under the eiderdown, and glared at every one, and left off purring for the first time.

Uli laughed at him. "Oh, you black, wise bundle of fur!" she exclaimed, hauling him up closer to her. "Very well, you may stay to-night, if you promise to be very good."

He quite understood, glared satisfied defiance at Henriette and Dorry, and began to purr again.

Tired as she was, Uli did not fall asleep at once. She remained for over an hour staring at the dimly lighted room, and stroking her cat, and thinking hard. What was she to do with her life? She must take up writing again, and then she questioned if she were capable of any concentration of effort. She had found lately that she could not concentrate her thoughts for any length of time; always, when she began thinking of one thing, something else would obtrude itself, sometimes quite an inconsequent thought; then she would skirt round that for a time, and go on to something else. She had always had a very great power of concentration, and she speculated whether the blow to her head and her subsequent illness had affected her brain at all. She had written a short poem while she was lying ill in bed, and though usually a facile rhymer, she had found more difficulty over the three verses than she had ever

experienced before. She wondered if this curious phase would last, or whether it was only temporary.

She thought she would write to Waddington Brett, and ask him if he cared to go on with the unfinished book; then she frowned to herself as the thought quickly followed that people might think she was going to marry him if the intimacy was renewed. Then her thoughts wandered over the old time of her friendship with Waddy, and how peaceful it was. She seemed to have had nothing but storm and stress since that hateful case was first mooted. Periods of passionate happiness certainly, but how had they ended? In chaos! Perhaps, after all, the people who led peaceful hum-drum lives were the happiest, and yet how glad she had been to *feel* at last. How she had wanted life, and when the opportunity came how she had seized it with both arms and hugged it close to her beating heart; and the beautiful rose of life had faded and left only the thorns to wound her. She heaved a deep sigh, almost a sob, and then she buried her face in Aristotle's warm black fur.

"Oh, Arry, Arry, how nice to be a cat!" she whispered to his twitching ear, "to eat and sleep and keep warm, and be philosophic, and to worry over nothing, and not strive to reach a star. Oh, Arry, what a mess I've made of things!"

And by-and-by she went to sleep holding one of Arry's warm paws in her hand, and Arry kept very, very still, because he knew it was an immense privilege to sleep on his lady's bed.

PART III

THE LEAVES OF LIFE

"You see we're tired, my heart and I.
We dealt with books, we trusted men,
And in our own blood drenched the pen,
As if such colours could not fly.

"How tired we feel, my heart and I!
We seem of no use in the world;
Our fancies hang grey and uncurled
About men's eyes indifferently;
Our voice which thrilled you so, will let
You sleep; our tears are only wet:
What do we here, my heart and I?"

E. B. Browning.

"Et tous les jours passés dans la tristesse,
Nous sont comptés comme des jours heureux."

"Before the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears;
Grief, with a glass that ran;
Pleasure, with pain for leaven;
Summer with flowers that fell;
Remembrance fallen from Heaven,
And madness risen from Hell;
Strength without hands to smite;
Love that endures for a breath;
Night the shadow of light,
And life the shadow of death."

Swinburne.

"This hour my utmost art I prove
And speak my passion—heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? . . ."

Browning.

"We two stood there with never a third,
But each by each, as each knew well:
The sights we saw and the sounds we heard,
The lights and the shades made up a spell
Till the trouble grew and stirred.
Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
And the little less, and what worlds away!
How a sound shall quicken content to bliss,
Or a breath suspend the blood's best play,
And life be a proof of this!"

BROWNING.

"Spring is here with the wind in her hair
And the violets under her feet.
All the forests have found her fair,
Lovers have found her sweet.

. . . . .

Cries to us to come at her call—
Wonders 'Why are ye sad?'

"Stands by graves in the dress of a bride,
'Drear is the song ye sing!'
If we tell her that men have died,
'What is death?' says the Spring."

ALICE HERBERT.

Chapter XXIV

THE next morning Jane Colwyn arrived to stay on a visit. Uli greeted her with the greatest affection; after their long separation it was good to see such a faithful friend again. She had written from Budapest to tell Jane that she was going to be married, and after the catastrophe Dorry had written to say that the engagement was broken off, and that Uli was very ill, and Jane had been kept informed as to the progress of her friend, but she knew no particulars. She noticed a great change in Uli; her face was thinner, and the life seemed to have gone out of it, except just now and then when she got very interested in a conversation. She did her hair differently, too, to hide the place where it had been cut, which was now covered with short thick curls, which Uli found very difficult to cover with the longer hair.

Jane looked into her friend's face with sad eyes; and Uli bent and kissed her again.

"Yes, Jane, I know," she said, in answer to the unspoken thoughts she read in Jane's eyes. "You deserve to know everything; you have been so faithful and good to me. I could not write, my dear. Dorry shall tell you about it. I've gone through the fire since I saw you last, Jane, and I have made an awful

muddle of everything. I can't speak of it; but Dorry will tell you."

And when Dorry did tell her, Jane raved. "I wonder you didn't kill him, Dorry!" she remarked.

Dorry smiled grimly. "I did think of it!" she answered quietly; "but I guess my life is more precious than his! and I bet you a dollar to a last year's bird's-nest that I shouldn't have managed it. Anyway, I had a revolver always on me, and if he'd appeared at Uli's door during that awful time, I'd have tried what I could do, and I am an excellent shot. Thank God, they managed to keep him out. I wonder if you'd have seen the fascination of the man?" she added musingly.

Jane shuddered. "Probably not," she remarked. "But then, Uli is a very different person. We must remember that she has a most curious mixture of blood in her, and it's likely that the very savageness of the man appealed to her in some odd way. Was he good-looking?"

"No—o," answered Dorry, hesitatingly. "There was a something fine about him, in a way, when one saw his eyes, and his voice was really beautiful. No, it was his extraordinary inner power and personality that seemed to knock Uli over. I believe he could do anything with her." She thought of the time up at Bá, but she said nothing of that to Jane.

Uli fell into the old groove again fairly easily. The old friends came to see her, and she had two proposals of marriage from men who had been hopelessly in love

with her for years. Lady Elizabeth West came up from the country on purpose to see her. She, too, had known of Uli's intention to marry in Hungary, and Dorry begged her to say nothing to Uli about it. She told Lady Elizabeth nothing further than that the man was a brute, and that the affair was broken off, and that Uli had been very ill; and that kind woman asked no questions, but she felt very sorrowful when she saw Uli, and wondered if anything would ever bring back the look of extraordinary vitality that had been such a charm in Uli's face in the old days.

She wrote to Waddy Brett, and implored him to try and make Uli take up writing again; and Waddy, who did not know that Uli had yet arrived in England, came up to town the next day.

Uli was out with Jane when he arrived; but Dorry was in, nursing a cold, and she asked him to come in and wait.

He talked to her for a few minutes about the doings of the winter. He had been very busy, and had been riding a good deal, with some success, and had had one nasty spill at Sandown which had laid him up for a week. Then he walked to the window, and looked out at the bleak road.

"I know nothing to speak of about your doings, Miss Dorry," he said quietly. "Will you tell me what has been happening? I heard Uli had been ill; is she better?"

"Yes, thanks," answered Dorry, in as ordinary a voice as she could. "She was very ill in Budapest.

She fell and hurt herself; but she's getting stronger every day."

Brett studied a milk-cart very attentively. "Er—I've not heard from her since she first arrived in Budapest. Then she said she was—er—might be going to be married. Is——"

Dorry interrupted him with an astonished face. "When she *first* arrived in Budapest? Why, what can you mean? She had not met him then."

Waddy swung round. "Not met him?" he exclaimed.

"No," answered Dorry, looking puzzled, "she met him about a week after we arrived, and she did not get engaged for some little time after that."

Waddy drew a quick breath through his teeth. "I was speaking of a man in Paris she wrote me about," he said rather grimly.

Dorry got scarlet. "Oh!" she stammered—"oh, I didn't know what you meant. There was a man there who was—who thought that—that Uli thought she might like, but she wouldn't accept him after."

Waddy wheeled to the window again and drummed on the pane with his fingers.

"Then she got engaged in Hungary!"—he spoke in a dull voice. "Is he Hungarian?"

Dorry got up and poked the fire viciously. "Look here, Mr. Brett," she began awkwardly, "I've put my foot in it evidently; I thought you meant the Hungarian when you spoke, and now you had better know this much. Uli did get engaged to a man, but he was a

fearful brute, and he made her ill with—worry. The whole thing is broken off and she hates him now."

"Then she is free!" There was such a curious note in his voice that Dorry glanced at his back quickly.

"Yes," she answered quietly, "and please don't pretend to know anything about it. Luckily, very few people knew, in confidence, so there's nothing to explain to the world."

Brett remained silent for a few minutes, then he came towards the fire.

"Thank you for telling me, Miss Dorry; I am glad to know she is free."

Dorry again looked up quickly. "Why—why—do you—?" Then she blushed again, and played with the poker.

"Yes," he said simply, "I never knew till after the case; but——" he dropped his head on his hands on the mantelpiece; then he added huskily, "Are you on my side, Miss Dorry?"

"I don't know," ejaculated that lady; "I'm so surprised. I never thought—it never entered my head; you were always just friends and—— Hush! here they are!"

Uli entered the room looking very white and tired; it was only the second time she had been out, and everything seemed to tire her now.

A sudden rush of colour came to her face as she saw Brett; but she shook hands very cordially and said she was delighted to see him; and indeed they soon drifted into the easy, intimate conversation of the old days. Waddy Brett's chief charm lay in his great versatility

of tastes and the extraordinary interest with which he entered into any discussion. He was always wholeheartedly wrapped up in his subject, and his eyes got bright, and he had a slight, almost foreign gesticulation of his hands when he was excited over anything.

Uli happened to mention a mutual friend, a Robert Tyne, of whom Lady Elizabeth had told her the day before. When she had left England he had been engaged to Lady Isobel Lynne, a girl whom she particularly disliked; and Mr. Tyne had brought down execration on himself from Society for having broken his engagement within the last few weeks.

"I cannot understand the point of view," exclaimed Brett, frowning; "there's no question of Lady Isobel being broken-hearted or anything, it was a simple *mariage de convenance* arranged by old Tyne and the Earl; and now everybody is working themselves up to a state of tearful agitation about it, as if it were a case of heartless desertion. The girl has been flirting for a year with young Berton, and I'm certain she would have ended the engagement long ago if she'd dared; but she's frightened of her father."

"Yes," said Mrs. Colwyn, "when I was staying with the Greenaways the other day there was a cousin of the Bertons there, and he was saying the same thing; that was before the engagement was broken."

"It's so ridiculous," continued Waddy; "why can't people allow others to arrange their lives for themselves? It seems to me that righteous indignation is a stock property that's brought out periodically like the

sausages in a pantomime. No one feels really indignant, and there's no sense in it; it's the correct thing to do. Every one has always execrated the jilt, just as the harlequin has always thrown sausages in Drury Lane. It's the custom. Here are two people, neither of whom wanted to marry the other, and because Tyne happens to have true courage and saves them both a life of misery, there's nothing bad enough for him. Upon my word, it's disgusting; I believe people would far rather have had them marry, be wretched, and end it in—in——" He got red and fidgeted.

Uli looked at the fire. "In the Divorce Court," she finished quietly. "Yes, of course, people would have preferred that. I never could understand why that ridiculous notion has crept up that you cannot break an engagement. What is the idea of an engagement? Probation, of course; otherwise a man would say, 'Here, will you marry me? Yes? Well, come along to the church!'" she laughed; "but we are at least a little civilized, and we arrange for people to be engaged—to see how they like it, I take it. Therefore, why on earth should it not be broken like any other engagement? A clerk may give notice to his principal and find some other work to do; why, when it's so very much more serious, cannot a man or a woman say, 'Well, we've tried this, and we find we are not suited; propinquity—which we were not able to try before we were engaged—has shown us that we do not agree'? But no, it's better, the world says, that they should keep their promise and be miserable."

Waddy flung out his hands. "Just so," he said heatedly: "namely,' the world practically says that a broken marriage vow is better than a broken betrothal vow."

"Look at poor little Queenie Dyson's case," said Uli, gravely; "I knew her well before her marriage, and she was simply wretched. I implored her to break her engagement; but she tearfully declared that she couldn't bear to be called a jilt. And see what she had to bear after! And ended by taking her poor little blameless life; all for what?—a chimera, a bogey set up to frighten children."

"Most things are bogeys set up to frighten children!" answered Waddy, with an impatient shrug of his shoulders. "By the way, Uli, now you're home again, can't we go on with the book?"

"'Chimera!'" said Uli, dreamily. "Yes, I should like to finish it; but I don't know whether I have the power to write now. I don't seem able to think——"

"Oh, you'd soon get into the way of it again. It's worth finishing."

Uli went to her writing-table and took out a manuscript from a drawer. She turned it over absent-mindedly.

"Fourteen chapters," she said, looking at the end. "It's not half done yet. Why don't *you* go on with it?"

"Because you know I can't. We're waiting for your part, you know. Conversation is not my strong point,

and we'd come to the scene between Bridget and Percival. I can't for the life of me do that." He leant forward and took the bundle of close-written paper, and went on impressively, "Look here, Uli, I'm up in town for some weeks now, let me come in to-morrow, and we'll begin reading it through, and continue till we finish it. That will revive our interest in it again, and then we'll go on with it. Do! I've been slogging away at all sorts of dull articles and things lately, and I long to write a novel again. Please consent."

"Very well," said Uli, hesitatingly. "But I have my doubts as to whether I shall be any good. I'll try, if you like."

"Thanks awfully," answered Waddy, boyishly. "I'll begin reading it over to you to-morrow. When may I come?"

"Come to lunch," invited Uli, "then you can begin 'right away,' as Dorry says. Do you know, I've almost forgotten it. I wonder if it is really good."

A slight interest awoke in her mind now that she was looking at the manuscript, and Waddy saw the interest in her eyes and rejoiced.

Within the next few days they finished reading what they had written, and Uli's imagination began to work. She made several suggestions in the course of the reading, and once she got up excitedly and began to pace the room.

"Don't you see we've made a mistake there, Waddy?" she cried. "We ought to have made the old

man come down that night, and not wait till next day. You know how people change with a night's rest; it's inartistic. We've made the conversation the next day what it would have been the night before, and it's all wrong. Look, we only would have to cut out these two pages, then add a bit—wait a minute."

She sat down quickly to her writing-table, drew some paper towards her, and began to write rapidly.

Waddy waited patiently, looking at her profile with a curious expression on his face. How he longed for this woman with the red, red mouth! But he contented himself for the present with the joy he had in her company after so long a separation, and with the look of life he had brought back to her face.

An excited colour was burning in her cheeks, and her eyes were bright as she turned round after about a quarter of an hour.

"Listen!" she exclaimed. "We carry on from there," laying her forefinger on a sentence of the sheet he was holding. "See, we cross out all that," running her pen through a page and a half, "now comes the ring at the door, and Martha opens it, then I've written this." She read what she had written, clear, succinct, and quite in her old style; she laid down the sheets after she had finished, and again pointed to a place in the manuscript. "Then we go on from here; do you see? The conversation is exactly the same. I can't think how we ever made that mistake."

"You're perfectly right," agreed Waddy, enthusiastically. "And besides, the reason you suggested—the

night environment—is so much more appropriate for the whole scene. It's splendid."

Uli's interest was now thoroughly aroused, and she wrote steadily every morning, and Waddy came every afternoon or evening, just as they had been wont to do in the old days. They were both exceedingly rapid writers, making few corrections as they went along, and waiting for the final reading, when the book should be done, to correct what was necessary. Uli's health improved, the colour came back to her face and the light to her eyes, and Lady Elizabeth, when she came up again to see her friend, blessed the bright thought she had had in writing to Waddy. Her kind old heart glowed, and she again began to hope that things "might turn out right" as she expressed it.

She was exceedingly fond of both Uli and Waddy; the latter she had known all his life, and she thought very highly of him.

She was far too tactful to show by even so much as a hint what she hoped, but she spoke to Dorry and Jane about it.

Dorry's mind was somewhat chaotic at this time. She had up to the present hoped that Uli's heart, in the proverbial rebound, would turn to Talmere, but one night in mental cross-examination she realized that she was selfish in this. She had at last—in that morning in Paris *en route* from Budapest—consented to marry Telbesco, and she wanted Uli to be always near her. She worshipped her friend with a whole-hearted love that is very rare in these days, and she knew that,

if only Talmere could win Uli, then she need not be separated from her. But she put this idea away from her as soon as she realized its fundamental selfishness, and said in her heart only, "May that come which is best for Uli. I want her to be happy above all things. God bless her."

Chapter XXV

DURING this time Dorry received a letter one day from Mrs. Tihanyi from Budapest, which worried her considerably. She consulted with Jane Colwyn, and decided to say nothing to Uli about it. Uli never spoke of Kertész, and she was looking so much better and happier that Dorry dreaded bringing back the look of a hunted animal to her friend's eyes.

"*Très chère* Miss Dorry," Uli's cousin wrote, "I am writing to you, as I feel sure it is best to let Uli forget that horrible affair if she can; you must use your own judgment about telling her, but if you care to take my advice, I should say that, if she asks no questions, I should say nothing; it would worry her, as it does us. Dézso Kertész heard nothing of your departure for two days. Apparently this was owing to rather an exciting time they had in parliament, when he had to make a great speech, and we hear was very busy receiving deputations and looking up technical details. However, when this was over he made inquiries, and found you had gone. When I heard this I sent him round the box and letter Uli had left for him. Then he came round here to see me, and I thought it best to see him, with my husband present, of course. I quietly told

him that Uli had sailed the day before for America with you, and when he refused to believe me I showed him the cable you had received. It quite convinced him! How clever of you to have thought of it! The man turned horribly white, and remained with his head in his hand for ten minutes. When he looked up I was *frightened*, Miss Dorry; I realized what our poor dear Uli must have felt that awful day. He got up very quietly and said, in a curious, intense voice, 'Will you give me their address?'

"My husband answered him that it was no earthly use writing to Uli again, that the letter she had written him had been final, and that she wished never to hear from him again. He looked at us in a curious, dreamy way, as if he were walking in his sleep, and answered: 'I do not intend to write; I shall go.' We did everything we could to persuade him to be sensible, but he hardly answered at all; and now we hear that he has really gone. How he thinks he will succeed in finding your home, when (as far as we know) he has no clue except Virginia, we cannot imagine. One good thing is, that it will take him some time, and we hope that that will calm him down somewhat. How thankful I m that you thought of the American plan. He has ired with Karl Virchow, it appears; but the party mad, because, as you will see from the papers, a e of cabinet is imminent, and it is more than that Dézso will have a place in the new one. not seem to care, though he has always been tious and enthusiastic over politics. He said

to Karl, 'If I am back, in time, all well and good; I will do what I can. If not, they must do without me.'

"Of course the story got about of his violence; but they all seem to take it as a matter of course. 'It's only Kertész,' they say in effect; and nothing the man has done appears to make any difference; they are fascinated by him!

"Now, Miss Dorry, I will keep you posted up in all the news whenever we have any. It will take him nearly a month anyway, even if he finds your home at once, and I don't see how he is to do that; then, directly he returns, there are sure to be political bothers, which we hope will keep him quiet for a time; then he may forget.

"I am writing to Uli, just an ordinary letter, and have not mentioned Dézso; do write to me and tell me how she is. Oh, how I regret it all! I feel so guilty. And I love her so, and would not have had her hurt for the world. I hope you will be able to stay with her; I know how fond you are of her, and that you will do everything that is possible to make her forget.

"Our best love,

"Your affectionate friend,

"OLGA TIHANYI."

Dorry smiled grimly to herself over the imagination of Kertész rushing wildly over to America, and searching Virginia from end to end. She wondered how he would succeed; her father was dead, and her mother was married again, so Kertész would not have even

the ordinary name of Richards to go upon. She hoped with Mrs. Tihanyi that his fury and ardour would gradually cool when he found that it was impossible to find them. Her people were not particularly prominent, and she had no brothers, so she hoped that the search might go on for a long time, giving him time to see how foolish the persecution was.

By the beginning of February she had heard no more from Mrs. Tihanyi, who wrote regularly to Uli, giving her little pieces of news about various friends, but never mentioning Kertész.

By this time Waddy and Uli had progressed greatly with the book. Waddy stayed in town the whole time, and they let nothing interrupt their work. Uli had quite recovered her look of vitality, and she was wrapped up in the story.

In the middle of February Dorry told her that Telbesco was coming over to London for a week to see her, and she added, rather hesitatingly, that Talmere was coming with him.

Uli shivered, and pushed her hair back in a way she had when she was troubled.

"Won't you see him, Uli?" asked Dorry, rather sadly.

"I suppose I shall have to," answered Uli, wrinkling her brows. "As you are going to marry Telbesco, I suppose I shall not be able to avoid Ivor all my life; but I hate it. It will be horribly painful to both of us. I feel I've behaved like a beast to him."

"He doesn't think so," said Dorry, quickly. "Johnny tells me that he completely exonerates you from all

blame. He said once that you were the only really honest woman he'd ever known, and that he'd far rather you'd done as you did than that you had married him feeling he was not the one man for you. He's heart-broken, of course, but absolutely resigned, and I think he wants to tell you so."

He came early one afternoon with Telbesco, and although Uli's heart was beating to suffocation, she managed to greet him calmly. Jane Colwyn was out, and shortly after their arrival Telbesco took his *fiancée* out for a drive. Uli was more at her ease now, and she chatted with Talmere about various subjects with a fair amount of *savoir faire.*

Then Talmere, standing up by the fireplace, spoke very quietly of his love. Uli hid her face in her hands. She felt acutely miserable. She loathed hurting anything, and she knew she had hurt this man's tender heart beyond words.

"I *hate* myself," she breathed huskily.

"My dear, don't!" said Ivor, looking into the fire. "I want you to realize that you gave me the happiest time my life has ever known. And surely that is something. You were perfectly honest with me. I knew I ran the risk; but I took my chances, as one has to take one's chances in life. I lost—that is all. But, Uli——" He hesitated for a moment, and then went on with a deepened voice, "Can you love me again? I am here, ready, darling; you've only to hold out your hand."

Uli's face was still hidden in her hands, but she shook her head.

"No, Ivor, it's over. I—I—didn't know—you are all that is good, but—oh, it's so difficult to explain a heart. One's heart seems a separate entity; one has no control over it. My brain tells me things, and all along my heart contradicts those things. I know now that what I felt for you was a better thing than what I felt for—what I——" She broke off and shuddered. "But it's dead, Ivor; I feel nothing more," she concluded hurriedly.

Talmere passed his hand quickly over his eyes, then he looked at her with infinite sadness.

"Will you promise me one thing, Uli?" She nodded. "If you ever want me will you write? Always, always to the end of the world, dear love, I shall be ready. I will never bother you again. I know it hurts you. I had to come, just to tell you this. Will you promise, Uli? You can ask Dorry; Telbesco will always be able to tell her that I am ready, waiting. Will you promise?"

He came over to her and laid his hand on her shoulder. She nodded, choking.

"Thank you, dear. I know you do not want me now, and probably never will. But if you do—— Good-bye. Don't move; I can see myself out."

She very seldom cried, but the tears were streaming down her face now as she lifted it. She could not speak, but she held out her hand to him to say good-bye. He bent and kissed the pink palm of it, and went out rapidly.

Uli gave a little sob, and buried her face in the

cushions. She was roused by a step, and she looked up quickly to see a Brett she did not know. She stared at him with her eyes still wet, and then he spoke in a voice as strange as his face.

"I met him in the hall. Is that the Paris man about whom you wrote to me after you'd left Paris?"

She nodded, with her eyes strained on this strange man she could not recognize.

"So you've taken him again!" he laughed harshly.

Uli wrung her hands. "Oh no, no, no!" she whispered.

He came a step nearer. "Then why—why are you crying?"

Uli caught the cushion in her arms and pressed it nervously.

"Because, oh, because I hurt him, and I'm a brute."

"You refused him?"

"Yes." Then she suddenly sprang to her feet, her wet eyes blazing. "What are you doing? Why should you cross-examine me like this? How dare you?" Her voice was furious. She kicked the cushion that had fallen to her feet, viciously. "I won't be cross-examined by any one. How dare you?"

Brett suddenly seized her two arms in a grip of iron, and pushed her back into the sofa; he bent over her, still holding her arms, and looked into her eyes.

"How dare I?" he repeated in a low, exultant voice, "how dare I? Because I love you, and am determined to win you."

Her eyes stared up at him blankly. "You *love* me?" she breathed. "*You* love me?"

"Yes, *I*, I love, love, love you. I have always loved you, I think, but I did not always know it. Uli, Uli, I shall make you love me. No, I don't want the love you gave this man who has just gone. That was the first excitement of your suddenly awakened heart. And I don't want the love you gave to that other."

Uli started violently, and Brett's eyes smiled at her as he went on.

"Oh yes, I knew you were engaged; I know nothing more, but I know that that is not the love I want. I know it was some wild thing that took possession of your heart with a maniac suddenness that was too fierce to last. I want something deeper than that. A love I *know* you have in you to give. I want you to love me to 'the level of everyday's most quiet needs.'—I want the passion too. Good God! Of course I do, but I want the passion that love gives birth to; I do not want the love that passion gives birth to. I will make you love me. I've been trying for six weeks, and I shall go on trying till you do. Oh, my sweet!"

He had sunk on his knees by her side, and he dropped his head on her lap, while she stared, and stared with the tears dried on her cheeks, and a curious sensation of uttermost loneliness seized hold of her heart. "So her friend was gone." That was all she could think; her friend was gone and left only the lover. She did not want lovers; her heart was tired.

As if he had read her thoughts, he suddenly looked up at her.

"I am just the same, Uli," he said, with a long, intent look into her wide-open eyes. "I shall never change, dear heart. I am your friend and collaborator only, till you consent—till you consent to give me your heart. I will not change. Do not fear. But I shall go on loving you with such a love that, by-and-by, you will feel that I deserve something more. Oh, Uli! Love me, love me!" He stretched out his arms to her; but she drew to one side and sprang to her feet, panting.

"I can't, I can't! You frighten me!" she stammered, with her hand to her head. "We were so happy before—at least, I was so contented. You've spoilt it all." She caught her breath, quickly, in a half sob.

Brett rose to his feet and caught hold of her hands. "I have *not* spoilt it all, dear. You are to forget all this. Do you quite understand? We are to be just as we were before. I will go away now; we will do no business to-day. To-morrow I will come for you and Mrs. Colwyn, as arranged, at ten o'clock, and we'll go down to Hampton Court. You'll be ready?"

Uli looked at him miserably. Then she nodded. "Yes, if you still think it necessary," she answered, rather vaguely.

"Of course I think it necessary," he retorted briskly. "We neither of us remember the scene sufficiently well to reconstruct it, and they may have changed things since either of us was there; they build so quickly

nowadays. Well, *au revoir*. I will be here at ten sharp." He shook hands and spoke with quite his ordinary manner. There was a little drawn look round his clean-cut mouth, but his eyes were steady, and his voice firm.

He was fighting very hard for self-control; he knew that everything depended on it. He might not be able to win Uli just yet, but he would not run the risk of losing her close friendship. He had not intended to speak for a long long while; he had meant to go on quietly surrounding Uli with love and devotion, winning her gradually, surely, making himself indispensable to her, till she would wake one day to the fact that this was the man she really wanted more than all others—the man who understood her best, the man she could lean on, and, above all, the man she could love best. But all his resolutions had been put to flight by the terrible suspicion that the other man had won her, and in a moment of overwhelming passion and fear he had lost control over his tongue and spoken. Now he must try and build up her confidence again, and set a tight rein over his manner and words. She had said she was frightened—that would never do; she must trust him absolutely. He walked the streets that night for many hours wrestling with himself, longing with a horrible tightening at his heart to feel his arms around her, but determining with all his will to show no sign of his longing until—he would never say "if" to himself, it was always "when." Now he knew she was free he was perfectly determined to win her love. He knew quite

well that he understood her, and sympathized with her more than any man alive could, and he knew that a love built on the great and firm friendship that they had had for so long held out a better chance of happiness than any sudden rush of love that might come to either of them from some stranger.

He understood absolutely the phases that Uli had gone through, because he understood absolutely her character. His heart ached when he thought of the love those other men had won from her, but he blamed her in nothing. She was the natural woman. He felt with a fine intuition the curious vicissitudes her heart had experienced. He knew she had been perfectly honest with herself, and he hoped with an almost frenzied longing—but never despair—that she would turn to him, as a ship in a storm turns to some friendly harbour.

He met her calmly and gaily the next morning; he did not appear to notice the slight uneasiness of her greeting, and before they were in the train he had the satisfaction of seeing her manner become natural again. He talked of the book, and of the scene in it which was their reason for taking this journey; the grounds of Hampton Court Palace and the towing-path outside had become a necessity to them, and, being very exact in their descriptions, they had decided to go down and get the picture in their mind's eye.

The day was clear and mild, the sky a pale soft blue, and they stepped out of the train chatting easily. Jane Colwyn was with them; she had not seen the

palace since she was a small child, and Uli had asked her to come. Dorry, naturally, was very occupied in town with Telbesco. They took two hours in going over the palace and grounds to please Jane; then they came out of the small door on the towing-path and walked along to the Mitre Hotel to have lunch.

"All this part has changed, hasn't it?" said Uli, as they arrived at the road; "but our part is exactly the same. We needn't have come down."

"Never mind," laughed Waddy; "it's an excuse for a jaunt, and Mrs. Colwyn has seen it all practically for the first time."

"And thoroughly enjoyed it!" exclaimed that lady. "I admire it more than Windsor—Windsor is much grander, but this is so old-world, and cosy; the colour pleases me so."

They had a simple lunch, and then crossed the bridge to the Molesey side, and turned to go towards the lock.

"How they build!" said Uli; "why, the last time I was down here there were no houses there; there was only that row. The other side seems the same; I don't think any of those houses have changed."

They stood looking over the river; on the tow-path was a horse, which was drawing a barge, the long rope straining from his collar. There were naturally no boats about, and all was quiet and peaceful.

"I wonder what that woman is doing," said Waddy, pointing to one of the gardens opposite. A punt was moored at the foot of the lawn, and a woman had got into it and was undoing the chain.

A man who was standing, and smoking a pipe, close to them guffawed.

"She's a servant over there," he volunteered, grinning, "and her people are away; she punts over every afternoon to see her young man who's a gardener up yonder," jerking his head behind him.

Uli laughed. "I wonder what 'her people' would say!"

"Oh, well," said Waddy, indulgently; "I dare say she—— By Jove! she'd better be careful, or she'll be run down by the barge. Hi!" he yelled at her, but she did not seem to hear. Then the man with the pipe yelled too, and she looked up quickly. He waved and pointed at the barge. She appeared to see it for the first time, and dug her punt pole suddenly into the river bed. She was not an expert punter, and she got flurried, and after a frenzied push, the punt gave a sudden lurch, and she was over the side with a piercing scream.

Waddy turned quickly to the man with the pipe who had uttered a furious oath.

"Where's a boat?"

"There's no boat, sir, before the ferry; they're all up high and dry."

Waddy ran down to the water's edge, and shaded his eyes with his hand. The woman's arms were beating wildly at the water; the barge was slowly coming on. On it was only one man at the rudder, and he appeared to have seen nothing. The boy who was riding the horse had stopped it, but the barge naturally still came on with its own impetus.

Waddy hesitated for one second, then he flung off his coat and jacket. Uli clutched Jane's arm.

"He's going in!" she gasped. "Oh, don't let him! Can't you swim?" she asked fiercely of the man with the pipe. He shook his head stupidly.

Uli ran towards Waddy, but before she got to the water he had plunged in and was swimming with long, quick strokes. The woman had disappeared.

Uli turned and caught hold of Jane's hand. "Oh, my God! The barge!" Jane, white and shaking, strained her eyes. Just then a group of men came running down the path. They waved and yelled at the man on the barge, but he gazed dully at them. They pointed at the river, but he looked to see a boat; saw only the empty punt, and moved his rudder slightly to steer clear of it.

Waddy was past the course of the barge, and they breathed more freely; then he dived, came up again, and again went down. This time he came up with the woman in his arm, and he started back for the bank, and in a second the barge was on him. Uli gave a gasping cry, and hid her face on Jane's shoulder.

"He's done for!" said the man with the pipe.

A deep shudder ran through the two women. Then, at a cry from one of the watchers, they looked up again horrified, reluctantly.

Waddy appeared from under the barge side, still with his burden, swimming strongly. He had dived, and the deadly danger had passed over him.

Uli choked, "Oh, thank God, thank God!"

The crowd had increased in the usual mysterious manner, and it gave a loud cheer now, and with one accord rushed down to the water side, and dozens of willing hands were outstretched as Waddy reached land. He had brought the woman to shore by the propelling method—his hand under her armpit and his elbow in her back, and she was clutched first by the hands held out on the bank, and laid down. Waddy was then seized, and scrambled to his feet, spitting out the water and shaking himself like a dog.

Uli caught his hand and looked at him with her eyes glowing.

"Thank God you're safe, Waddy!" she whispered, with trembling lips. "Oh, that barge! We thought you didn't see it."

"Nor I did. The water was so cold I forgot it was there for a moment, but I just saw it in time to sink. Stand away, Uli; don't let me wet you. I must see to this tiresome woman."

But two men, more sensible than the rest, had taken the inert body in hand, held down the tongue, and slanted her down to get the water out, and they started rubbing her violently. As Waddy spoke, she opened her eyes and spluttered; then she sat up. She gazed vacantly at the river for an instant; then, "Oh, the punt!" she exclaimed anxiously.

"All right, my girl," said a rough-looking man, kindly; "it's drifting down. I'll run down below the bridge and get the ferryman to bring it in;" and he started off.

The girl was moving her left arm gingerly and making faces; then she stared at Waddy's dripping form.

"Yes, it's 'im as saved you," said one of the men.

"Wot a brute you are!" remarked the lady, shivering; "you've 'urt my arm simply awful. I just can't move it."

Waddy gave a sudden roar of laughter, and turned on his heel.

"You ungrateful little beast!" exclaimed Uli, more forcibly than elegantly. "And you would be dead now if it weren't for him."

"I'm sure I'm grateful enough," answered the girl, indignantly; "only I do think as 'e needn't 'ave been so rough. I'm sure I'm bruised ever so."

Uli turned with a disgusted look and picked up Waddy's coats. He was talking to Jane.

"Waddy," called Uli, quickly, "don't stand there like that. Run to Tagg's Hotel as fast as you can, and get into bed while they dry your things."

"Yes, sir, come on! I'll get you a hot drink." This from one of the hotel men who had been standing in the crowd.

Waddy's teeth were chattering, and he turned and went towards the hotel, after one glance at the girl on the ground.

"She's all right now," he remarked, with a good-tempered smile. "Bring her down a hot grog, waiter, and then she can be punted back to the house and get into her own things."

"She's not worth bothering about, sir," muttered the waiter, with a shrug—"a baggage, an ungrateful baggage."

Uli and Jane followed in the crowd up to the hotel.

The waiter took possession of Waddy with all the importance of a man who has, by his own exertions, discovered a hero. He waved the crowd away at the door, and conducted his charge up to a bedroom, where he proceeded to strip and rub him in front of a hastily lit fire. Then he insisted on him having a hot bath, and being wrapped in blankets and dosed with strange drinks of his own invention.

Either owing to the efficacious methods of the waiter, or to his own robust health, certainly Brett suffered no harm from his cold bath, and when they returned to town that night he was in high spirits, and laughed most heartily at Uli's indignation over the servant's ingratitude.

Chapter XXVI

A FEW days later Talmere and Telbesco went back to Paris. Dorry had promised to marry the latter "later on," and when he complained of her vagueness, she said she could not marry him till Uli was more settled. Probably it would be in the early summer.

The *decree nisi* in the Branton divorce suit had been made absolute in the first days of February, and there were rumours now that Sir George Branton had married secretly at a registry office the week after.

When Uli heard this she smiled a little. "I'm sure I hope he'll be satisfied with her," she remarked to Dorry, who had told her. "He took an infinite amount of pains to get her, and did a horribly dishonourable thing. I never spoke to her, but she certainly looked charming."

Dorry sniffed.

Uli was silent for a little. Then she said suddenly, "It's curious to think that I should have been marrying too, if—if—nothing had happened. Dorry, have you ever had any news?"

Dorry flushed hotly. This was the first time her friend had referred to the past since their return.

"Yes!" she answered, fidgeting about the room. "Your cousin wrote to me."

"Well?" asked Uli, quietly. "Oh, you needn't mind telling me; I only never mentioned it because it was hateful to me. But now we're on the subject you may as well tell me; I'd better know."

"Are you sure you won't get miserable again, Uli?"

Uli smiled at her. "No, my dear; it has no power to make me miserable now."

"Well, your cousin wrote that he'd gone to America after us."

Uli nodded. "I thought he would," she said.

"Since then," continued Dorry, "Mrs. Tihanyi has written only once to say that he had written to some one from America on arriving, and that no more had been heard from him. I'll fetch the letters if you wish it."

"No," replied Uli, slowly—"no; I only wanted to know the facts. It's a good thing we arranged the American plan."

Dorry shuddered. "Yes, I should think it was! As a matter of fact, I think he has his work cut out for him; you know that there are none of our family left as Richards, and I think it will be fairly difficult for him to find mother's home. Mrs. Tihanyi hopes that he will be tired out; then, when he returns, or soon after, there is bound to be a crisis in Parliament, and they think he will be in the new Cabinet. That ought to keep him quiet; he's very ambitious."

Uli played dreamily with a seal on her writing-table; she wondered whether he would forget so easily.

"Well, time will show," she said, with a shrug of her shoulders. "We can't do any more; we'd better forget while we can."

Uli was a great dreamer, as sensitive, highly strung people nearly always are, and that night she dreamed without ceasing as it seemed. Dreams of all sorts of places and people succeeded each other with lightning rapidity. Then towards morning she dreamed very vividly that she was standing on the bank of a wide, swiftly flowing river, a river utterly unknown to her; on the opposite bank she saw George Branton and the woman he had married walking arm-in-arm. Presently the woman turned and saw her, dropped her husband's arm, and stood pointing. Then, in the curious way dreams have of suddenly changing without gradual progression, the woman was in the water, and struggling violently in the swift stream, and from somewhere behind the dreamer Waddy Brett ran and started taking off his coat; Uli in her dream flew to him, and clung with all the strength of her arms to his body.

"No, no!" she shrieked. "Stay with me; I can't spare you; you would be drowned."

He tried to undo her arms from round him, but she twined them closer, and all the time she heard the woman screaming and beating the water.

"Let me go!" Waddy cried, trying to force her hands apart. "You do not want me; you do not love me. At least I can die doing some good."

She felt her hands giving way, and slid to her knees, still clinging with her failing strength to his arm. He

gave a final wrench and was free, and had sprung away from her to the water, taking off his coat as he moved. She tried to get to her feet, but her dress wound itself round her legs, and she stumbled and fell again; then, as he lifted his arms for diving, she cried aloud—

"Stay, stay; I do want you! Stay, Waddy; *I love you!*" He turned on the edge of the steep bank and looked at her, and she stretched out her arms to him, and cried out again, "I love you!"

And then she awoke suddenly. She was half kneeling on the floor by a chair and clinging to it. A night light was burning dimly, and she stared round her. Her own words were singing in her ears, "I love you!"

She got dizzily to her feet and crept back to bed. "I love you!" The whole room seemed full of whispering voices all saying the same thing. She shivered. Then she turned on the light, poured herself out some milk, and drank it thirstily. Her clock pointed to ten minutes past six, and she listened to the noises in the street with a preoccupied air. She recalled her dream with a shudder; she felt exhausted with the struggle. She looked at her wrist and arms as if she expected to see them bruised; they had no mark upon them, but her fingers were sore and swollen, evidently in her despair she had clung to the armchair with all her strength. She studied each finger-tip with interest, and all the time the room seemed ringing with those words. Then it struck her that she had read somewhere that the vibration of sound clings to a place long after the actual

CHAPTER XXVI

A FEW days later Talmere and Telbesco went back to Paris. Dorry had promised to marry the latter "later on," and when he complained of her vagueness, she said she could not marry him till Uli was more settled. Probably it would be in the early summer.

The decree nisi in the Branton divorce suit had been made absolute in the first days of February, and there were rumours that Sir George Branton had married secretly at

"Oh, my lady, are you ill?" she asked anxiously.

"No," answered Uli, wearily; "I'm cold and tired, and want my tea. I had a dream that woke me, that's all. It was only a dream."

That morning she found she could not write; everything she wrote she tore up afterwards. She felt unsettled and restless. She wrote and sent a telegram to Brett, telling him not to come that day as she did not feel well enough to work. She went out shopping, and that night she and her two friends went to the theatre.

When they came home they ate the dainty little supper prepared for them, and discussed the play merrily. Dorry looked rather anxiously at Uli several times; she could not quite understand the expression her friend's face had worn all day. However, she said nothing, but kissed her a little extra lovingly when they parted for the night.

When Dorry got into her dressing-gown she discovered she had a slight nervous headache, an ill to which she was accustomed after a theatre. She searched in a drawer for her neuralgic crystal, but could not find it, then remembered she had lent it to Uli the week before.

She opened her door softly, and slipped across the passage. She knocked at Uli's door, and thought she heard "Come in," so she entered.

Uli was standing by her medicine cupboard, and a quantity of bottles and packets were on the table by her side. She looked startled as Dorry entered, and dropped a case of plaister.

sound has died. She felt she must have uttered her despairing passionate cry aloud. She moistened her lips and tried to speak, but only a whisper came; then she tried again and spoke—

"Dear God, help me. You know my heart is dead; how can I love again?"

The words trembled into silence, and then out of the silence came the old words—

"I love you, I love you!"

Then she buried her face in the pillow and put her fingers to her ears, and in front of her shut eyes came the vision of the deep-flowing angry river and Waddy standing ready to dive to almost certain death. She sat up again and argued with herself.

"I did not mind him going in the other day. I was frightened, of course, as one would be with any friend. But I would not have stopped him. I did not mind."

"*Didn't you*—think?" said some strange voice; and Uli thought, with a frown on her forehead.

"No, no, no! It was only a dream; one is so silly in dreams."

"When the barge struck him, as you thought, what did you feel then?" continued the voice, mockingly.

Then Uli bent her head on her hunched-up knees and buried her fingers in her hair and groaned.

"I can never marry him—never!" And somewhere she thought she heard a faint sighing laugh.

When Simpson came in at eight she found the electric light turned on, and her mistress sitting huddled up in bed white and haggard-eyed.

"Oh, my lady, are you ill?" she asked anxiously.

"No," answered Uli, wearily; "I'm cold and tired, and want my tea. I had a dream that woke me, that's all. It was only a dream."

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"Oh, I beg your pardon, Uli; I thought you said 'Come in.' Funny you should be looking there; I've been hunting for my menthol crystal, and remembered that you had it. Can you find it anywhere?"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, dear girl; I told Henriette to put it in your room. She's just left me and gone to bed; tap at her door and ask her where she put it."

"Oh, it's sure to be somewhere about," said Dorry, cheerfully; and she looked in various places. "Here it is! I remember Henriette's propensity for putting things in vases." She took the crystal and was preparing to go, then she glanced at the array of bottles turned out of the medicine cupboard. "What are you looking for?" she asked casually. "Evidently something you haven't wanted for some time, judging by the way it's hidden itself."

"I can't find it," Uli answered, pushing the bottles about. "It's the sulphonal."

"Why?" asked Dorry, startled. "Aren't you sleeping well?"

"No; I dreamed incessantly last night," and Uli frowned quickly, "and it's no rest to one, that sort of sleep. I want a real good night; I feel exhausted."

Dorry half closed her eyes and looked at Uli's restless hands.

"I wonder if it was Kertész," she said to herself; "she's looked queer all day." Then aloud she said, "I think I have some in my room; I'll go and see."

She brought back the bottle for her friend, and

watched her take out three of the tabloids and swallow them in some water.

"Sleep well, dear;" she kissed Uli tenderly. "If you want me you can always call me, you know that."

"Thank you, dormouse, but I hope I shall sleep all right to-night. Good-night."

Dorry went to her room frowning. She forgot about her headache, and stood for a long time in front of the fire with the menthol in her hand. She did so hope Uli was not beginning to think of Kertész again. It would be fatal, she felt sure. She wondered if the man's mysterious power could possibly extend across distance, and affect Uli, to her detriment, now she had apparently become happy and contented. She hoped, with ardour that Uli's interest in the last remaining chapters of the book now in progress would succeed in restoring her to her normal condition again.

And certainly her wish appeared to be fulfilled, because the next few weeks seemed to pass in absolute tranquillity of soul for Uli.

She worked harder than ever, and in the middle of March the book was finished.

And on the same day, Dorry received a letter from Mrs. Tihanyi.

"I promised to send you news directly I had it myself," she wrote; "and now something interesting has happened. There was a frightful row in the House last week, and Dézso Kertész's party are in despair. They want him here. The ministry may fall any day, and

sound was that. She felt she must have uttered her
despairing passionate cry aloud. She moistened her
lips and tried to speak, but only a whisper came; the
sick voice said spoke—

"Dear God help me. You know my heart is dead.
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'Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some with a flattering word,
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword.'

I have often thought how true that is, Dorry. I should *hate* the 'coward's kiss,' but I should hate the flattering word more. The sword I could forgive. It was not that, it was that somehow I was shown in a flash that we could never be happy. I know that I sound horribly inconsistent, but I couldn't help it. I just hated him after, and I *know* it was not the blow."

Dorry said nothing, but just stroked Uli's hand. She could not *understand*, but she *sympathized*, which is not such a paradox as it seems.

Uli was very busy the next week, sending the book to be typed, and correcting the type-written copy as it was returned a few chapters at a time. She had the thrill of successfully achieved effort, that is one of the most acute thrills in the world. Waddy came every evening, and he and the two visitors sat late in front of the fire, while Uli read out the book to them. Dorry and Jane had not heard it before, and did not even know the whole plot. They sat fascinated, while the charming voice went on, never tiring, for hour after hour. They were agreed that it was a far better book than "Behind the Blind," and on the third evening, when Uli let the last sheets rustle into her lap, they enthusiastically acclaimed it.

Uli was staring into the fire, with tears—born of

"I don't believe the woman knew," she said kindly; "she doesn't look that sort of woman. I think George just fell in love with her, and she with him; then, as he could manage nothing without marriage, he quietly set his brain to work to get what he wanted."

Just then Brett was shown in, and greeted Uli, and Lady Elizabeth shook hands heartily.

"I was so delighted to hear that the book is done; it's splendid for you. I suppose the same publishers will take it?"

"Yes," answered Waddy, shaking hands with Jane and Dorry; "they've practically taken it now. They say that if it's as good as the last we can regard it as a settled thing; and it's better, I know."

"Well done; I am so pleased! Now, are you going to start another?"

Brett laughed. "Oh, you mustn't work us to death, dear lady. We're going to have a little rest, aren't we, Uli? We may start one next month, we've got a plot more or less thought out. In the meanwhile I have to finish a series of racing articles for *The Field* and write three longish things for *The Nineteenth Century* which I promised them a long time ago."

"About what?"

"Music! The first is 'The Influence of the Italian Renaissance on Music.'"

"Oh!" Lady Elizabeth laughed, "that's too deep for me. Though I think the period is most interesting. But music I don't understand. Oh, that reminds me, I saw the Cornaughtons going into the Queen's Hall

yesterday, have you heard that Lady Prudence is engaged? Just announced."

"No!" Waddy looked interested. "To whom?"

"A man named Bundel of all names!" answered Lady Elizabeth, laughing. "Anyway, he's a bundle of banknotes; he owns a coal mine or two and various other things, and he's something to do with some canal or other. She met him up in Scotland, it appears; then he followed her down South. Ah, well, they need money, poor things, and Andover won't marry apparently"—with a sly look at Uli. "And after all, poor girl, she couldn't wait for you for ever, Waddy."

"Wait for me!" exclaimed Brett, astonished. "What do you mean?" He looked so awkward and boyish that all the women laughed.

"Oh, you dear dunder-headed sex!" smiled Lady Elizabeth. "I firmly believe that when a woman makes up her mind to marry a man, that man is the very last to know it. Of course you were expected to marry her, you silly, puzzled-looking thing!"

"Oh Lord! why, it never entered my head. We were just friends and nothing more; we used to ride a little, that's all."

"A little riding is a very dangerous thing!" paraphrased Dorry, smiling broadly.

"No; but I say, Lady Elizabeth, I'm sure you're wrong. You oughtn't to say such a thing." He looked quite worried; and Lady Elizabeth laughed again.

"There! There!" she said good-naturedly. "I didn't mean it unkindly. It was so well known that I

thought you must know. It's quite true, isn't it, Uli?"

Uli was searching diligently in a drawer for something, and she did not turn round.

"Yes, I think so," she answered quietly; "Lord Andover told me so, at least."

"Oh, the whole thing's rot." Waddy went to the window and looked out. "I wish you hadn't said it. I don't think it's true; but I shall feel uncomfortable when I meet her again. I say, do you know Spring is really here; the bushes are lovely out there, and I noticed the trees in the Park this morning have quite a decent leafy shade on them."

They talked of other matters till Lady Elizabeth got up to go.

"I'm driving down to Bond Street; do any of you want to go in that direction? I can give you a lift."

Jane looked at Dorry. "Dorry and I were going to Oxford Street! We've got two separate businesses there."

"Dresses or hats, I suppose!" laughed Lady Elizabeth.

"No, mine is a tea-gown, and Dorry's is a bag she's having fitted."

"Well, come along then. One of you will have to sit on the little seat; but, in any case, it's as comfortable as a hansom."

When they returned to the room in their outdoor garments, Lady Elizabeth kissed Uli affectionately.

"You'll come to lunch, all of you, on Monday, then?

That's right. And you come too, Waddy; one-thirty. *Au revoir*, and all success to the book."

"What a lamb she is!" said Uli, as the door was shut on them. "I love her more every time I see her."

Waddy was looking out of the window again, and he said nothing, while Simpson cleared away the tea; he came away when she began to pull down the blinds and draw the curtains, and he struck a match and lit Uli's cigarette for her, and one for himself.

The moment they were alone, he turned from his contemplation of the fire and said quickly—

"Uli, how could Andover tell you that about his sister? It was a rum thing for a chap to do."

Uli fidgeted. "Oh, it was only casually; it was *à propos* of something; I don't suppose he knew he said it even."

"*A propos* of what?"

"Oh, something he was saying, something I said—he—oh, it was not said purposely, Waddy; he just blurted it out that Lady Prudence would be glad."

"Glad of what?"

Uli remained silent, and gazed at the toe of her shoe.

"Glad of what, Uli?" Waddy repeated, with his eyes on her. "I think you might tell me."

"Oh, bother!" Uli stooped and picked a little lump of ash off the carpet and flung it into the grate. "Oh, only he was saying he hoped I should be—oh, that—well, he was taking it for granted as every one else did, and when I said it was not so, and never would be, he just said that. That's all."

Having finished this exceedingly coherent speech, she fell to smoking quickly.

"Oh," said Waddy, thoughtfully, "I see." He paused a moment, and then regarding her bent head, which glittered like a bronze aureole with the shaded light above it, he said slowly, "And never would be."

Uli bent her head lower, and looked carefully at her cigarette.

"Well, Uli, don't fear me; I will not worry you. I promised."

Uli put her lighted cigarette down on an ashtray by her side, and pulled a glass paper-weight nearer her and contemplated it steadily.

"Waddy," she said suddenly, "will you look at this drawer? I can't get it open; something is stuck inside. I've tried slipping a knife in and pushing down, but I can't move it."

She was sitting by her writing-table, a pretty piece of furniture with drawers down one side. Waddy came and knelt down and pulled the refractory drawer tentatively; it came out for about an inch, and then stuck. He shook it backwards and forwards violently, then took a long paper-knife and passed it through the slit, and moved it about.

"I suppose there's no opening from the drawer above?"

"No, I've looked; the thing's solid. This paper-knife is better; try this."

She leant her hand flat on the table to bend forward to get a knife out of a case, and then she gave a sharp

scream and started away. The shaking of the bureau had shaken the lighted cigarette off the ashtray, and she had put her hand upon it.

Waddy saw what had happened in an instant, and he seized the flattened stump and flung it into the fire, then caught her hand and turned it palm upwards.

"Good Lord, what a burn!" he exclaimed, horrified. "Wait; let me suck it first, then we'll put something on it."

He fastened his lips to the angry mark and sucked hard. Uli gave a tiny sob of pain, but remained quite still.

Waddy got up from his knees and went out of the room.

"I'll be back in a moment; stay there," he called.

He returned with a tin box in his hand and a bottle of eau de Cologne, and some linen.

"What have you got there?" asked Uli. "I always put on oil."

Brett took an old china saucer from a stand and put some powder from the tin box in it.

"This is far better for small burns," he said, busying himself by making a paste with the eau de Cologne. "It's bicarbonate of soda, and it must be kept wet till the sting has gone. I invaded the kitchen, and cook gave me some, and Henriette gave me the linen and eau de Cologne. There, hold your hand quite still while I bind it."

He put a thick paste of the mixture over the burn,

and deftly bound up the hand with a long strip of soft linen.

"It feels better already," said Uli, gratefully. "How awfully clever of you, Waddy; thank you so much. It was stupid of me. I never can look before I do things; my father used to say I was the clumsiest girl he ever knew."

"It was my fault entirely"—Brett's voice trembled slightly. "I shook the cigarette off the tray. I ought to have seen. Poor little, dear white hand."

He was kneeling at her feet, and he bent and kissed her wrist tenderly. Uli drew in her breath quickly, and their eyes met.

In one second his arms were round her, and his mouth on hers.

They remained like that while love's minutes that are seconds, or seconds that are minutes, counted themselves out in heart-beats, and then Uli shivered.

"At last, at last!" said Waddy, huskily. "Oh Heaven, how I've prayed for it! Darling, darling, it's too good to be true!"

Uli's head fell back on the cushions behind her, and her eyes shut; he stood on his feet and bent over her and kissed her hair. Then she opened her eyes and looked at him. He started a little, they were so stricken with woe.

"What is it? Don't look like that; oh, don't."

She pushed back his face with her left hand and covered her eyes with it; a little dry sob broke from her trembling lips.

"Uli! dear heart, what is it? All is happy now. You will be cherished and understood as long as we are spared to one another."

"I can never marry you!" said Uli, drearily.

He drew a small chair close to her, and sat down and took her hand.

"Dear, what do you mean? You love me, I know you love me. I saw it and felt it."

"Yes, I love you."

"Well?"

Suddenly she sprang to her feet and went to the fire; she turned round to him almost fiercely—

"And what is the love of a woman like I am worth?"

"All the world to me, Uli," he answered quietly; and then he came towards her. But she moved away from him.

"Listen, Waddy, listen. I am worth nothing, and I can never marry you."

"You *shall*," said Waddy, through his teeth.

"Never, never, never, Waddy; I have been in love twice in the last eight months. I thought each of them was the genuine thing."

"And what do you think now about your love for me? Tell me honestly."

Uli pushed her hair away from her temples. "It *is* the real thing. God knows it is. I was wandering, restlessly searching before, and now the peace, the infinite peace! I feel like a tired naughty child, who at last has found its mother's breast, and all is calm and

deep exquisite joy. I thought love was a fierce thing that hurt, and gripped the heart; and now I know it was peace I wanted, the peace that passeth all understanding. I have the passionate love for you too, but it is blended and moulded so into the other that it gives me no restless pain, it seems only an outcome of the other."

She ended with another quick sob.

"That is what I want," he cried exultantly; "that is what I have prayed for. My sweet, you have come to me through tribulation. I'd far rather have the love you give to me now, through judgment, than the love you gave to those others. We will build up a tremendous happiness upon it."

He put his arm round her as she stood by the mantelpiece with her face hidden in her arms; but she shook him off almost roughly.

She looked up at him with wide-open, dazed eyes.

"Waddy, Waddy, don't torture me!" Her voice was a cry of despair. "You don't understand; I can't marry you."

"Why?"

The word came out crisp and short; the man was suffering now, but he bit his lips till they hurt, and he determined to fight every inch of the way. Now he had won her he did not intend to lose her; he felt almost the same sort of excitement as when he was riding a hard race; the quiet strong force of will to win that he brought to bear when his horse and another jumped the last fence neck to neck he felt now, only now he was fighting for his life's happiness.

"Why?" he repeated, in the same still voice.

Uli clutched her wounded hand and pressed it with the other. She wanted to feel pain, sheer, physical pain, anything to ease the bitter ache at her heart. She walked to the windows, then turned and came back. He knew her habit of restlessly pacing a room when she was excited, and he watched her anxiously. Again the hair was swept from her face by her hot twitching fingers, and she began to speak in the peculiarly low voice that comes from intense heart stress.

"I am not fit to marry any good man. I can never marry. I loved Ivor Talmere, and I thought I loved him as much as I could; I had never known that sort of love. I would not promise him to marry him till I was sure of myself; I said I would tell him when I returned from Hungary. I let him make love to me. I was happy, and I returned him his love with fervour." Her voice took on the monotony of her pacing, and Waddy remained quite still watching her.

"Then I went away, hating to leave him, but thinking I should return soon, and make him and myself happy. A few days after I got to Budapest I met Dézso Kertész." She shuddered. "He is called 'the Silver-tongued,' and is well thought of in Parliament. He is very rich and very much liked. He fascinates every one he chooses. He chose to fascinate me; he had a curious hypnotic influence over people, and he swept me off my feet. I belonged to him body and soul. We became engaged. Then one day he got jealous of Ivor Talmere, and wanted to see his letter

written me in answer to my breaking with him. I naturally would not give it up, and he struck me." She put up her hand in answer to a fierce exclamation from Brett, and went on in the same low voice. "I fell amongst glass and things, and I was nearly killed. I was ill for weeks; my head was cut open, and my collar-bone broken. Then when I got well we came away. He was told we'd gone to America, and he has gone there to look for us. It was not the blow that killed my love, I don't know what it was. His want of trust, I think. Anyway, I had nothing left but a great loathing of him, and of myself for ever having loved him. No, it was not the blow—if you hit me I should not change, you are you. It was the extraordinary revelation I had of what the man really was, my love just died."

She paused a moment in her speech, but the restless walk still went on.

Waddy was white to the lips. If he had spoken at all it would have been a string of vile curses; but he bit his lips till they bled, and remained silent.

Uli swept out her arms suddenly, and for the first time her voice broke and became the hoarse murmur of a person stricken to the heart.

"He made me love him, he made me love him, and I wanted nothing but him; and oh, my God, my God, he took me. Do you understand? He took my body before he ill-used it."

Waddy remained quite still, and she looked at him for the first time with her strained, dilated eyes.

"*Won't* you understand?" she whispered hoarsely. "He took me—*me*"—and she beat her hand on her breast—"*all* of me."

For one long instant the man and the woman stared into each other's eyes. Then Waddy dropped on to the sofa and hid his face. His shoulders shook, and the hard, difficult sobs of a man in deepest agony of soul broke from him.

Uli groaned, and walked back to the window again. Backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards she paced, her hands pressed close together, her mouth open, panting, Presently she flung herself, exhausted, into a deep chair, and laid her head back with closed eyes.

The silence was only broken by the strangled sounds from the sofa, and soon even these ceased.

There was no time for either of them. It might have been minutes or hours; it was one long torture of brain and heart and soul.

He got up and went over to her. She did not open her eyes, but she said, in a very low voice—

"Now you know. Good-bye."

He knelt beside her, and picked up both her inert hands and kissed them.

"I love you," he said very quietly. "I will make you forget."

She rocked her head from side to side wearily.

"Oh, Uli, Uli, my love! Do you think that I am such a poor thing? You beautiful woman, it's you I love, every bit of you. Your soul is as pure as it ever was."

She opened her eyes wide upon him with a world of woe in them.

"No, no, no," she sobbed.

"And I say, 'yes'! My God, Uli, do you really think that I could change? I will never give you up now I know you love me. If you'd committed every known crime it would make no difference. I love you, the ego of you. Heavens! if you were a base woman, it would make no difference to me. I *love* you. Do you hear, dear woman?"

He shook her arms.

She pushed her chair back, and got shakily to her feet.

"I will never marry you. I am not so bad as that."

He stood in front of her, and took her face in his hands.

"Look at me, Uli. Now, what do you see in my eyes? Fickleness?"

She shivered from head to foot. "I will not marry you."

"And I say you shall. Do you think I'm a fool to wreck your life and my own because of a chimera? Do you write one thing in a book and mean another? I swear you shall marry me." He was still looking into her eyes, and he saw them glaze. "Yes, dear heart," he went on quickly, "you cannot think now; but I will come back to-morrow, and then you will know that you must marry me. Do you hear? Uli! Uli! what's the matter?"

But Uli could not answer. She gave a gasp or two, and fell forward in his arms.

He laid her on the sofa, and rang the bell furiously.

"Send Henriette here quickly," he said, over his shoulder to Simpson. "Your mistress has fainted; she burnt her hand badly, and the pain has been too much for her."

Chapter XXVIII

WHEN Uli regained consciousness, the first thing she said was, "Oh, my hand!"

Simpson was supporting her head, and she answered quietly, "Drink this brandy my lady; you'll be better soon. We're keeping the burn damp, as Mr. Brett told us, and he says the sting will soon go. The pain made you faint, my lady."

Uli turned her head restlessly, and the whole scene came back to her.

"Yes, the pain made me faint," she said bitterly. "Has Mr. Brett gone?"

"*Oui, madame,*" answered Henriette, looking up from the hot-water bottle she had been holding to her mistress's feet. "He said it would only worry us, his staying; he's coming back later to see how you are."

Uli sighed deeply.

The cook put her head in at the door. "Here's the other bottle," she said in a whisper. "Oh, is she better?"

"Yes, cook, I'm all right now, thank you. I'm afraid I frightened every one horribly. It's only the third time in my life that I've fainted. So silly for a burn like that." Again there was the bitterness in her voice, which the servants did not notice.

Just then there was a ring at the door, and the cook went to open it. It was Dorry and Jane, and cook explained matters to them. They came into the room full of concern.

"Oh, you poor angel!" cried Dorry; "I am so sorry we were out. Are you better?"

"Yes, thanks, dear. I feel all right now. It was stupid of me; I burnt my hand, you know, and the pain made me faint."

Jane and Dorry knew their friend very well, and they glanced quickly at each other at the curious tone in her voice.

"Does it hurt less now?" asked Jane, tenderly stroking the bandaged hand.

"Yes, the sting really seems better now; I think the worst is over. Thank you, Simpson and Henriette for what you have done; you've been very good."

"Why, we've done nothing, my lady. Just finish this brandy; it will do you good."

Uli obediently finished the brandy, and Simpson carried away the empty glass. Henriette threw a cover over Uli's feet, and stood up.

"Is there anything else I can do for madame?" she asked wistfully.

"Yes, Henriette, you can pack; we shall go over to Paris to-morrow by the eleven train. I'll take you too."

Henriette beamed as she left the room; but Jane and Dorry gasped. Uli turned her face away as she spoke.

"I hope you won't mind, you two."

"No; but——" Jane and Dorry spoke together, and both left an interrogation in the air. Uli played with the fringe of the *couvre-pieds*.

"Well, Paris is lovely in April, and I like doing things suddenly. We'll all go and have a good time. You'll come, of course, Dorry? Jane, you'll come too, won't you?"

"Yes, certainly; I shall love it. I haven't been to Paris for two years."

"That's right. The truth is, I have been working rather hard, and the excitement of the book and everything—— I think a change will do me good."

She gave her explanation rather incoherently and hurriedly, and Dorry stole a glance at Jane with uplifted, questioning eyebrows.

"Well, we'd better go and tell Henriette what we want to take," she said, moving to the door. "You won't change for dinner, will you, Uli?"

Uli got slowly to her feet. "Yes, I'll put on a tea-gown. No, I'm quite well now," she added, waving Jane's arm away. "It was silly of me fainting! I feel all right now. I'm afraid Simpson's brandy was very strong; I feel quite giddy." She laughed a little, but there was no mirth in her laugh; and again her two friends exchanged a glance of wonder.

When she got to her room she sank wearily into a chair. Then she suddenly thought of something.

"Ask Simpson to come here," she said to Henriette.

When the girl came, Uli spoke very casually. "Oh,

Simpson, when Mr. Brett comes, tell him I'm better, but say I can't see any one to-night. And—er—don't say we are going to Paris to-morrow; I may change my mind in the morning, and in any case I can write to him."

"Very well, my lady."

The next morning, before they started, Uli wrote a little note and sent it by messenger to Brett.

"Dear, I'm running away from you," she wrote. "I am afraid of you; I am afraid of your love. You are so strong. I cannot marry you, Waddy; it would be doing you a great wrong. I shall love you always. Changeable as I may seem, I know that at last I have found the love beyond all change, and it will fill my heart and soul always. Think that what I do is for the best, and do not hate me."

It was a poor pathetic little note, and Waddy pressed it to his lips and gave a very tender little smile.

"You dear, sweet, silly little woman," he whispered, "do you really think that I will let you go? Well, now for the flat."

When Simpson opened the door he greeted her with his usual cheerful "Good morning;" then he said quietly—

"Lady Branton wrote to me this morning, Simpson. I'm very glad she's gone away; it will do her good. She's been working too hard. She says in her note that the 'above address will find her;' but she forgot in her hurry to put the name of the hotel. I have to send her on a letter from the publishers to-day, so will you give me the name of the hotel?"

Simpson, utterly unsuspicious, answered briskly, "Certainly, sir. It's hotel something, *rue de* something. Wait one moment, sir; I will get the paper Miss Richards wrote out."

She brought the paper, and Waddy glanced at it. "Ah, I thought it would be the same hotel," he remarked carelessly, "but I didn't like to write there until I knew for certain. Thank you, Simpson; I hope Lady Branton's hand was better this morning."

"Yes, thank you, sir. It is stiff, of course, but there's no pain in it. The pain got better last night before dinner."

Waddy dashed back to St. James's in a hansom, and told his man to pack and be ready to go to Paris by the afternoon train.

Then he drove down to his publishers.

When he arrived in Paris he sent his man on to his hotel with the luggage, and drove to the Rue de Rivoli. He pondered *en route* how he was to see Uli alone, and at last thought of a plan.

He gave a tip to the porter, and told him to find Miss Richards, and tell her quietly that there was a gentleman who wished to speak to her. He was not to let any one else hear.

He waited in a small sitting-room close to the door, which luckily was empty.

Dorry soon entered with a light in her eyes, which changed to astonishment when she saw Brett.

"Oh, you!" she remarked. She had expected Telbesco, to whom she had sent a telegram.

"Yes, I! Miss Dorry, I want you to help me."

Dorry sat down and looked interested.

"Look here, Miss Dorry, I love Uli as you know."

Dorry nodded.

"Well, Uli told me last night that she loves me."

"I thought so!" remarked Dorry. "I've seen it coming on for ages."

She talked as if it were an illness, and Brett smiled.

"Now she refuses to marry me for some utterly inadequate reason, and she has run away from me."

Dorry bit her lips and thought deeply. "I think I know why she refused to marry you," she said at last.

"Perhaps you do," answered Brett, looking at her hard, and, when he saw a flush steal up Dorry's usually pale face, he nodded. "Yes, I think you do. Well, I I am going to marry her. Do you understand? She is everything to me, and now I know she loves me, nothing on God's earth will make me give her up."

Dorry held out her hand to him impulsively. "You're one of the best," she said huskily. "I'll help you all I know."

"Have you a sitting-room?" asked Brett, anxiously.

"Yes. We don't usually, but this time we all thought it would be jolly. The hotel is crowded with my country people, and we none of us like unlimited twangs all day long."

She smiled humorously, and Waddy laughed.

"Well, I bless the twang now," he said gaily. "Now, Miss Dorry, can you get Mrs. Colwyn out of the room and leave Uli alone in it?"

"Why, yes, sure," drawled Dorry.

"Very well. I will come up with you and wait in the passage, then you come and show me the door—see?"

"Come right away," said Dorry, with her most energetic air.

They mounted by the lift, and Dorry left him. In two minutes she returned, and led him to a door and went away.

He knocked, and Uli's voice answered, "*Entrez!*"

When he went in she was sitting by the fire, which she always had lit if the weather was not too hot. She did not turn round, and Waddy feasted his eyes on the graceful curve of her neck rising out of the billowy lace of a tea-gown.

"The book is accepted," he said quietly.

Uli started violently, and sprang up and faced him. He went towards her and took her in his arms.

"Oh, you silly dear!" he said very tenderly. "How could you think you could escape me?

> "'Escape me?
> Never—
> Beloved!
> While I am I, and you are you,
> So long as the world contains us both,
> Me the loving, and you the loth,
> While the one eludes, must the other pursue.'

But I hope you won't go on trying to elude me, darling; it's no good, you know, you'll have to give in in the end."

Her head was lying on his breast, and he bent and kissed her hair. She sighed.

"No, love, don't sigh. Your lips were meant for smiles. Look up, sweet, and smile at me." He lifted her head gently, and held it with his hand under her chin. "Your eyes, Uli, your eyes!"

She lifted the long lashes and looked at him—a long, long look.

"I cannot"—but he stopped the words with a kiss. "Oh, Waddy, Waddy!" Her voice was weak and broken. "You *must* not! Go away, dear; it's better for you. I feel it—I know it. You tempt me so, and I am so weak."

"Thank God for that, dear love."

Suddenly she flung her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately.

"Oh, God, it's wrong, it's wrong; I know it's wrong! But I do want you so; I do want to be really happy."

He sat down in the armchair she had quitted when he came in, and drew her down to his arms.

"You shall be happy; my whole life shall be devoted to making you happy, my darling."

"It's wrong," repeated Uli, weakly.

"Darling, listen, I am going to speak plainly to you, almost brutally." Waddy's voice had a little break in it, and he held her tight. "My dear, beautiful woman, what are we men to lay down a law for ourselves and another for women? I am sure that God understands. Love is the one divine gift we poor mundane mortals are given. You gave for love, my dear; you gave with

both hands just for love. We men give without love very often: which is the most to be despised?"

She shivered in his arms. "Yes, but when I told you, you were horrified."

He stroked her hair. "Jealous, Uli," he answered gently, "furiously, frantically jealous. The brute-beast part of a man, 'this woman is mine, and nobody else must touch her.' I was furious—I wanted to kill; and then I was so sorry for your sorrow. I realized what you felt."

He went on talking in a low tender voice for a long time, holding her all the time quite close in his arms. They did not realize how time passed, and when Dorry knocked and entered an hour afterwards, they sprang up startled.

Dorry looked at them whimsically. "Excuse me, dear people, but I've had such difficulty in guarding the door, that at last in despair I've had to come in and end the *séance*. Well, I guess it's all right anyway."

Uli blushed furiously. "I'm so sorry, Dorry," she said apologetically.

"Are you?" Dorry laughed. "Well, Mr. Brett doesn't look very sorry, and I can't say you look overwhelmed."

Then she came and put her arms round Uli and kissed her.

"Dear, I'm so very, very glad," she said softly. Then she held out her hand to Waddy. "You deserve her, and I can't pay you a higher compliment."

Waddy pressed her hand till it hurt, and then bent and kissed her.

"You're the best friend a woman ever had, Miss Dorry, and I pray you may be as happy as I intend to make Uli."

Dorry blushed and laughed. Then Jane tentatively tapped, and was bidden to enter. She took in the situation at a glance, and her plain little face beamed with love and congratulations as she kissed her friend.

"Well, I suppose I must go," said Waddy, regretfully. "It appears to be half-past eleven, though how it can be I can't imagine." Dorry giggled. "I will come and fetch you all out to lunch to-morrow. We'll go to Armenonville. Nearly all the trees are out here, and the Bois will be lovely. I'll come in a motor at eleven thirty. Will that do?"

They agreed, and Jane and Dorry remembered important business in the next room while Waddy said good-night to Uli.

Chapter XXIX

THE chestnuts, larches, and birches were covered with little adorably tender green leaves, and the stiff blackness of the oaks and ashes only accentuated their fresh greenness. The earth sent up a beautiful odour, the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang. The whole air breathed of Spring, and every soul seemed happy.

Waddy had driven out the three friends to Armenonville, and given them a delightful lunch. Uli had a little wistful tenderness on her face that was infinitely charming, and fascinated her lover to such an extent that he could hardly talk coherently.

After coffee and cigarettes they all four wandered out and down the *Avenue des Acacias*, admiring afresh the beauty of one of the greatest charms of Paris, that most favoured of all cities. The Bois looked superb. The undergrowth was a vivid green, and the early Spring seemed to fill their hearts with a joy that was almost painful.

Dorry felt a little sad. Telbesco had sent a telegram from Bordeaux in answer to hers, saying that he had been called away two days before on business, but that he was returning that night and would come straight to her. She wanted him here all amongst the trees' young freshness. She looked round her, and made a mental

vow to come to just this spot with her lover the next morning. They had wandered down one of the innumerable alleys, and they might have been many miles from any dwelling.

There was no one about just here, and the only sounds were the songs of the birds.

Jane and Dorry dropped behind, and Dorry took Jane's arm affectionately.

"I think she will be happy now, Jane," she said, with a little smile at the couple in front.

Waddy had slipped his arm through Uli's, and was holding her hand in his.

"Yes," answered Jane, with a little thrill of affection in her voice; "I am sure she will. I always wanted this to happen. He understands her as very few people can, and I don't think they can ever be anything else but happy. Then they will work together. It is a most delightful outlook."

"I only hope that brute in Budapest will keep quiet," remarked Dorry.

"Well, he can do nothing now," said Jane, shrugging her shoulders.

"I'm not so sure. He might try to frighten her. Anyway, I'm ready for him if I happen to be there." Dorry's voice was grim.

"What do you mean, Dorry?"

Dorry slipped her hand into the inside pocket of her loose coat and produced a tiny revolver. Jane gave a little cry.

"Oh, Dorry, is it loaded?"

"Why, sure," said Dorry, with a chuckle. "It can do deadly work, too. I have never been without it since those awful days in Uli's sick-room. No, I don't intend to have her frightened; and if he begins it, out this comes!"

She spoke with grim determination, and put the pistol back in its hiding-place.

"However," she went on, with a lighter manner, "I hope the man has got resigned by this time. Mrs. Tihanyi wrote a few days ago, saying that he had returned, and was apparently wrapped up in his work. Oh, Jane, isn't this beautiful?"

They stood admiring a group of silver birches, surrounded by a dense green undergrowth. Uli and Waddy had found the mysterious two chairs that one finds in the most wild and unexpected places in the Bois, and they were sitting very close together. Waddy was playing with her left hand. He tapped the third finger tenderly.

"What are your favourite stones, sweet?" he asked, with a smile into her eyes. "You said in some story you wrote once that they were emeralds and diamonds."

"Fancy remembering that!" exclaimed Uli. "Yes, that is my favourite combination. Emeralds are nearly the only coloured stone I admire."

"Give me a ring that fits you, and I will go this afternoon and choose one for you. Oh, my sweet, adorable woman, how happy I am! Do you know, Uli, I have never been really happy in my life. I have had plenty of interests, plenty of excitement, but

never, till now, have I known what it was to feel completely and perfectly happy."

Uli leant her shoulder with a caressing movement against his.

"*Dear!*" she murmured, "oh, I will try to make you happy, if it is only in return for the exquisite peace you have brought to me. I can't tell you, Waddy, what I feel; you will be able, perhaps, to know in time. I feel as if I had been struggling all along to reach this perfection. Fighting blindly in the storm and stress, in the dark, stretching out my hand to find the perfect love, and my hands only grasped excitement, and pleasure that hurt. Now you have given me what unconsciously I wanted all along. Every nerve seems soothed, and the joy that I feel is more than words can express. Waddy"—she paused, and her eyes looked dreamily at a robin with a piece of fluff in his beak.

"Well, love?"

"I wonder if I may say something? I want to tell you"— she blushed a delicate pink and held his hand tightly; then she went on in a very low tender little voice—"Waddy, I never wanted—I never wanted a child before, but now I——" She stopped, and he leant towards her thrilling to his finger-tips.

"Beloved," he whispered—"beloved, thank you for saying that. Oh, my sweet, how I——"

He was interrupted by a shrill scream, and Dorry's voice, terrified out of recognition, called, "Take care! take care!"

He looked up, startled. From the bushes on his left

a face white with passion was staring at him. He saw the gleam of something metallic, and he sprang to his feet. Dorry's steps came rushing towards them, but before she came the metallic thing was lifted, and a short sharp sound broke the stillness and frightened the birds to silence.

Waddy took two steps forward, then he wheeled round towards Uli and fell at her feet.

The tweed-clad arm in the bushes again lifted the metallic thing, and it now pointed at Uli, but Dorry's pistol-shot rang out first, and the tweed-clad arm fell; then again, and there was a cry and a crash in the bushes.

Uli stood stiffly upright, and stared at Waddy's body.

Dorry shook her arm, and Jane fell on her knees, sobbing hysterically.

"Uli, speak!" Dorry screamed at her; "don't look like that. *Speak.*"

Uli looked up vaguely.

"He is dead," she said quite quietly. "Dézso never missed; he boasted that he never missed."

Jane had with difficulty turned Waddy over, and the dead face looked up at them, life-like and smiling.

"You see," said Uli, in the same hard voice, "he is dead. Dézso never misses."

"And *I never miss either!*" cried Dorry, with her hand on Waddy's still heart.

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